Also by NILS-OLOF FRANZÉN

All illustrated by QUENTIN BLAKE

Agaton Sax and the Diamond Thieves

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Agaton Sax and the Scotland Yard Mystery

0 233 96078 3

Agaton Sax and the Haunted House

0 233 96675 7

Agaton Sax and the Criminal Doubles

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Agaton Sax and the Colossus of Rhodes

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Agaton Sax and the London Computer Plot

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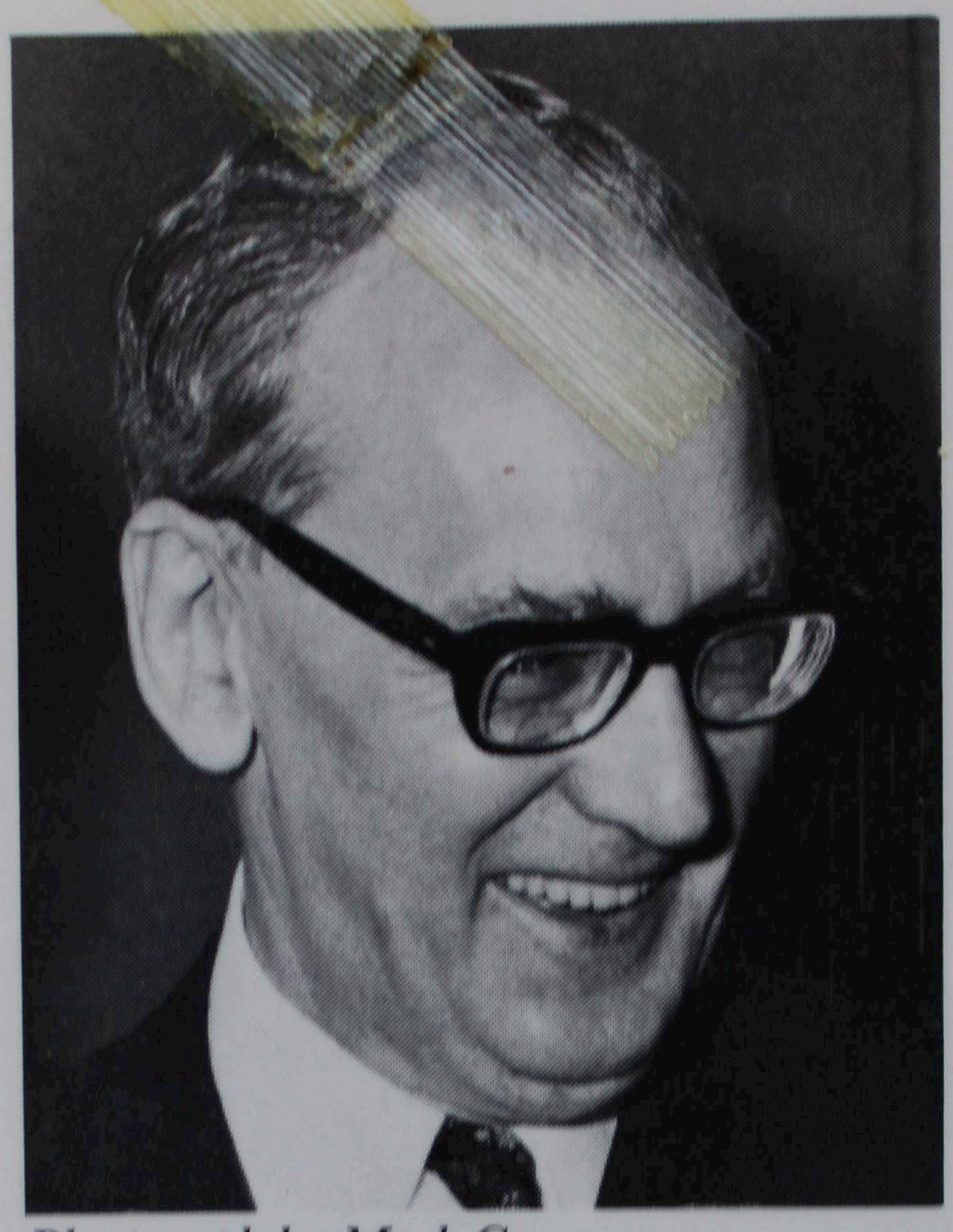


Photograph by Mark Gerson

Nils-Olof Franzén was for many years Director of Programmes for Swedish radio. He has always enjoyed writing, and the Agaton Sax stories provided him with just the kind of relaxation he needed. The fact that they please not only his own son, but children all over Europe and America, has been a source of great delight to him. He says that the plots for the stories always suggest themselves to him when he is riding a bicycle, another of his favourite pastimes.

Jacket design by Quentin Blake

'So you asked the Bank of England to have the forged banknotes printed, and they co-operated magnificently and had the whole job done in three hours.'

'Correct.'

'Now the question I put to you, Mr Lispington, is this: is it possible for the Bank of England to produce counterfeit money?'

'I don't follow you, Mr Sax. How do you mean?'

'I simply mean that *any* money manufactured by the State, and the Bank of England represents the State, must be genuine, whatever it looks like. Isn't that true?'

'My goodness, I never thought of that—nor did the Bank of England,' said Lispington, turning pale. 'What a terrible risk we've all been running!'

koping. I also assumed that when he got my answer from the computer, he would waste no time in grabbing the suit-case full of money and beating it in the helicopter. Super Max could be relied upon to go after him, after which all you and I would have to do would be to set Aunt Matilda free and catch Super Max. Everything happened just as I thought it would—but perhaps not in quite the way I had imagined.'

'The pilot got away with the suit-case, for one thing,' said Lispington with a little smile.

'Quite true, but your men will soon catch up with him. And as the banknotes were all specially, and not very carefully, forged by the Bank of England for the robbery, it doesn't really matter if the pilot does get away with them for a few days.'

'Isn't it remarkable that Super Max never discovered that the banknotes he stole from the train were all forged?'

'I suppose the idea never entered his head. Would you, Mr Lispington, suspect that 10,000 £10,000 notes being transported under lock and key directly from the Bank of England to Newcastle by train would be forged?'

'No, I suppose not,' said Lispington dreamily.

'Has anything struck you as remarkable about this legal forgery, Mr Lispington?'

'No.'

'Well, as you will remember, I asked you to arrange for all the banknotes sent in that consignment to be forged, and not genuine. Because, if, in spite of all our efforts, Mr Lispington, Super Max had got away with it, the British Government would have been very angry, and the British taxpayer would have stood to lose a great deal of money.'

'Certainly.'

marked AXY 37865 and AXT 37866, naturally you thought that the hair belonged to one of the thieves. However, after a close inspection of the hair, and an analysis of its properties—a complicated process in which Clever Dick was of the greatest help to me—I came to the conclusion that the hair could only have come from your head. But the interesting point was that you were not the only person to assume it belonged to Super Max. He also believed that it was his. That's why he tried to steal it—and that's why he was so terribly afraid of being arrested. As a matter of fact you never had a shred of evidence against him! But because we were able to make him believe that the hair belonged to him, we proved that he was the criminal we were looking for! We couldn't arrest him for the train robbery, because we could never have proved that he was behind it. We could seize Mox for breaking in to the luggage van, but no one else. It was thanks to Clever Dick and Aunt Matilda that we were able to pull in Super Max himself.'

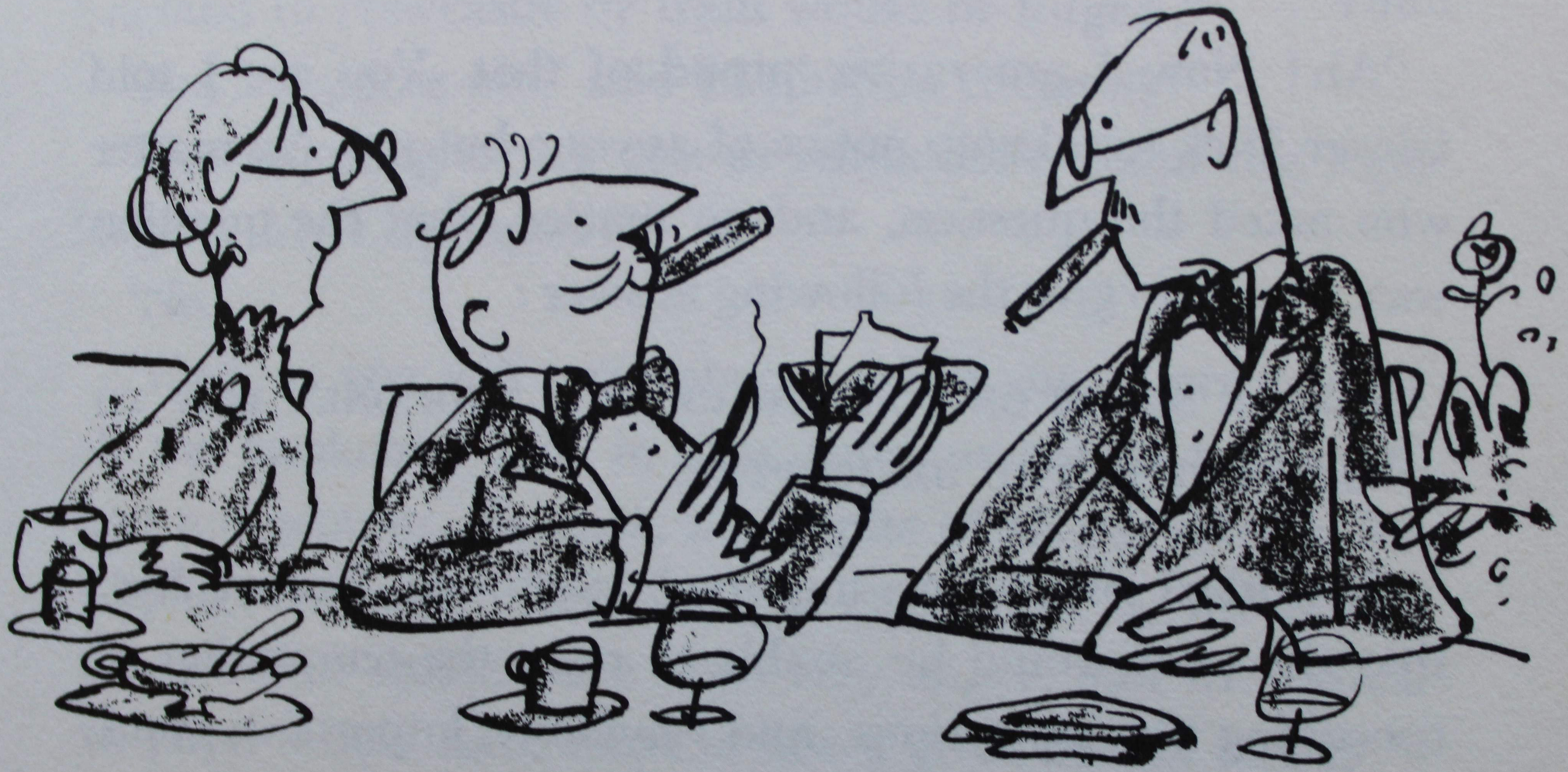
'Talking of Clever Dick!' exclaimed Lispington—what was the answer he gave to the questions the pilot asked him?"

'Ah! Now I am rather proud of that. You see I told Clever Dick to take no notice of anyone but me. No matter who asked the question, and no matter what the question was, he was to give the following answer :

AGATON SAX IS ON YOUR TRACK NOW. THE ONLY WAY TO ESCAPE IS IN THE HELICOPTER.

'I worked on the assumption,' continued Agaton Sax, that the pilot would be unable to resist the temptation of consulting the mysterious, and obviously important, computer he had been ordered to steal from my home in By-

'Perhaps it's time I told you the whole story,' said Agaton Sax. 'When you found this hair between the banknotes



arm of the Assistant Chancellor of the Exchequer. Agaton Sax had Mr Lispington on his left.

At the end of the meal, as the two friends sat contentedly smoking their after-dinner cigars, Agaton Sax suddenly put his hand in his pocket and produced his wallet, and a pair of delicate tweezers: with these he picked up a small hair, carefully pressed between two sheets of paper in the wallet.

'Allow me to return to you your precious hair, Lispington,' he said with a gracious smile.

'But it is not mine,' said Lispington. 'As a valuable piece of evidence it is the property of Scotland Yard.'

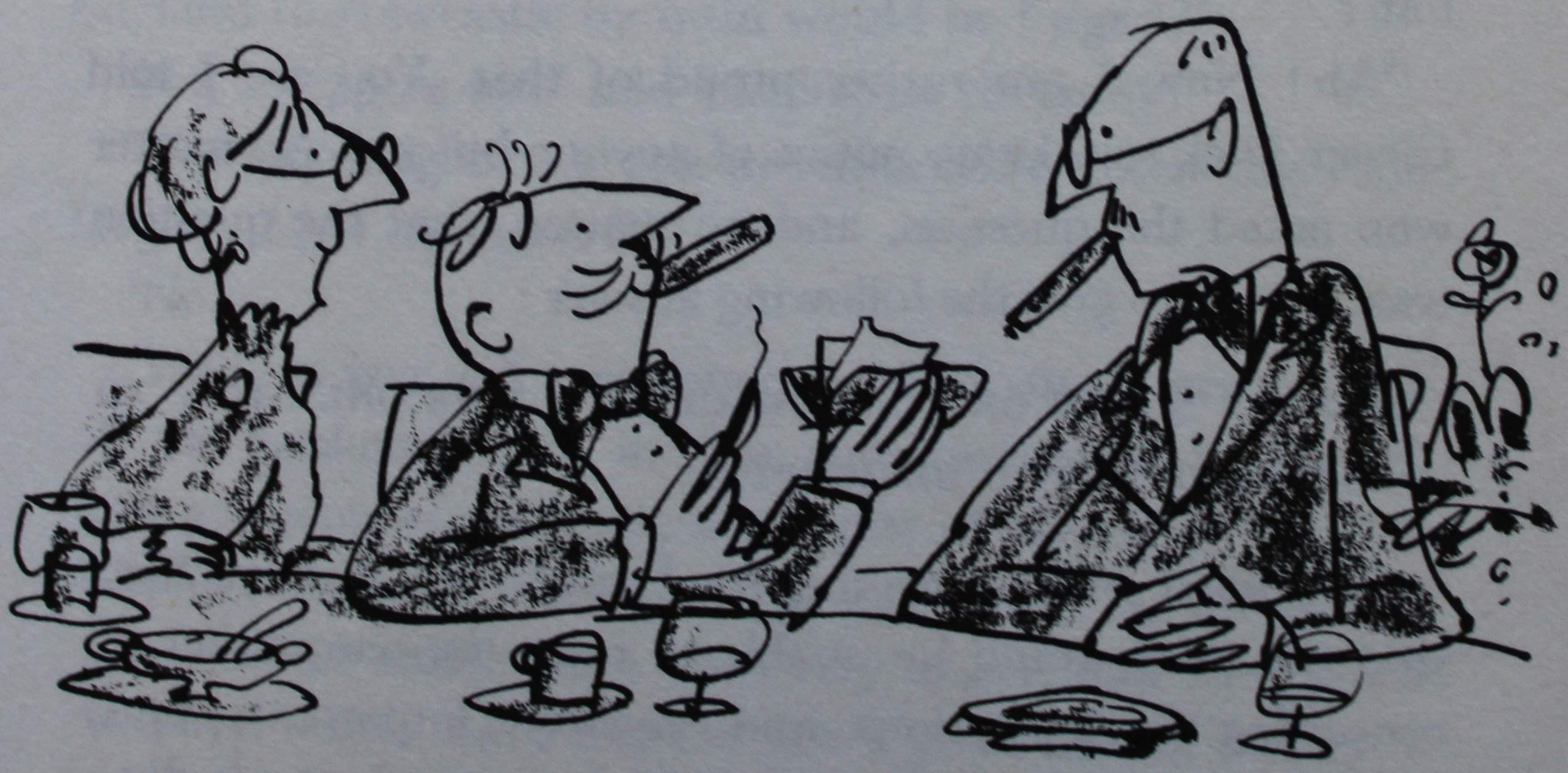
'No, Lispington, it is *yours,*' insisted Agaton Sax.

'Absolutely not, Mr Sax! This hair of Super Max's belongs to Scotland Yard.'

'I'm sorry, Lispington, but it is yours. In other words, this hair comes from your own head. It never grew on Super Max's.'

'I don't understand!'

'Perhaps it's time I told you the whole story,' said Agaton Sax. 'When you found this hair between the banknotes



old woman! I warn you, sir—she's dangerous, raving mad, you are never able to know what she'll do next.'

In his agitation Super Max was forgetting the English grammar he had tried to learn before buying Wollecombe Manor and setting himself up as an English gentleman.

'The transmissions are coming from your house, so you will be held responsible for them,' broke in Lispington, cutting short any further discussion. 'Mr Super Max—in the name of the law I arrest you on suspicion of having illegally obtained police radio equipment for the purpose of transmitting messages in a foreign language. If a charge is brought against you, it will automatically mean an investigation into the possibility of subsequently charging you with first-degree espionage. The investigation of the case may take some time—probably two or three weeks. You understand what that means? You will be kept in custody pending enquiries and you will have no access to either scissors or razor. Do you see what I'm getting at, Mr Super Max? Hair will cover your bald head once again, won't it? And I shall have the evidence I want, won't I?'

Lispington's triumph was complete. Super Max, beside himself with rage and humiliation, realised that the game was up. He surrendered. Three minutes later he confessed to the bank robbery and to the train robbery. He even went so far as to sign a written confession.

This last act proved to be most important, in the light of Agaton Sax's revelations to Lispington on the following evening. It was a splendid evening: Scotland Yard gave a banquet in one of the Bank of England's spacious and lofty vaults. Agaton Sax and Aunt Matilda were, of course, the guests of honour. Aunt Matilda went in to dinner on the

'Come with you? Why should I come with you?' exclaimed Super Max.

'Because I'm pretty sure there's something fishy going on there,' said the police officer, pointing an accusing finger at the manor.

'Nothing of the sort! You have no right to make insinuations to me and I shall protest with all my vigour at the proper time and in the proper place and to the proper people about how offensive your behaviour has been to me,' said Super Max, drawing himself up.

'You'd better watch your words, sir, if you see what I mean,' said the police officer. 'Our radio-operator has picked up your wave-length. Illegal radio transmissions are going out from this very manor. Somebody is fiddling with stolen police radio equipment, I should guess.'

'I've never heard anything so flagrantly preposterous!' said Super Max. 'My solicitors will easily prove that your ridiculous accusation is entirely based on lies.'

'No it's not, sir,' said Agaton Sax calmly, producing his Monday pipe. He pressed a button, so tiny as to be almost invisible, on the bowl of the pipe, and Aunt Matilda's voice could be heard coming from the small loudspeaker hidden in the bowl:

'*Calling all cars . . . Calling all cars . . .* I'm fed up with this! I'm *not* going to stand here all day calling all those cars. I'm leaving, and you'd better come along and lock the place up yourselves.'

'There you are, sir,' the police officer said to Super Max. I never had a better case to take before the court. Illegal broadcasting—and in a foreign language, too!'

'But *I* have not arranged any illegal broadcasts,' protested Super Max. 'Never in my life. It must be that crazy

'You know very well where the money is,' retorted Lisp-

'You know very well where the money is,' retorted Lispington. 'Up there—in the helicopter!'

'Then how can you charge *me* with this extraordinary theft you are carrying on about? Am I a helicopter?'

Agaton Sax stroked his moustache thoughtfully. Then, turning to Lispington, he murmured: 'I'm afraid he's right, you know.'

But the officer in command of the police unit, not having the slightest idea who anyone was, said grimly:

'What's going on? Do you all live in that old rook's nest?'

'If by that insolent remark you mean Wollecombe Manor,' said Super Max angrily, '*I* am the owner of it.'

'Well, in that case you'd better come with us,' said the police officer.

'The police!'

'The police?'

'Yes. They are approaching the house, I can see them. Be careful, Agaton, they look very angry!'

'Where are they?'

'They're coming along the main road on motor-cycles. One of them has caught sight of the helicopter.'

Aunt Matilda was right, as usual. Four police-sergeants on motor-cycles were closing in on Super Max and Mix. The pilot was already out of their reach. He lifted the helicopter another thirty feet or so, circled above their heads for a few seconds, then dashed away at top speed, leaving Super Max overcome with rage and humiliation, waving his fists helplessly in the air. Then, suddenly, he spun round and saw, at a glance, the policemen and the detectives cutting off his retreat. This horrible sight was too much for him. His face turned white and he staggered uncertainly.

'Arrest that man! Sieze him!' Lispington ordered the four policemen, pointing grimly at Super Max.

But Max was too well trained in the ways of crime to be at a disadvantage for long. He recovered his self-control, and his face assumed its customary expression of insolent self-confidence. Turning haughtily to Lispington, he said with a cool smile:

'And who are you, sir, to address a law-abiding citizen, stainless of reputation, in this most insolent and defamatory manner? What, if I may ask, is your accusation of me?'

'I accuse you of stealing £10,000,000, sir!'

'Preposterous! And where do you think I have concealed all that money? Here in the breast-pocket of my coat? Or here in my cigarette-case? Or poked between the soles of my shoes, perhaps?'

frantically into the air in a vain attempt to grasp the skid of the helicopter.

'Come down, come down, I beg you, you traitor ten times over, you hooligan!' he shouted at the top of his voice. 'How could I ever have put my trust in such a snake in the grass?'

Behind him his little brother Mix, thin as a rake, was watching the helicopter in stupefied silence. Heavy tears poured down his cheeks as he realised that the pilot had stolen the suitcase with the money.

Suddenly Agaton Sax heard his Aunt's voice again.

'Hallo, Agaton, are you there?'

'Yes, Aunt, I'm here!'

'I'm calling all cars!'

'What on earth do you mean, Aunt?'

'I told you, I'm calling all cars.'

'What cars?' asked Agaton, dismayed by this development.

'All police cars, of course!' said Aunt Matilda angrily. 'Surely you don't mean to say you've never watched television, Agaton? They call all cars all the time. *Calling all cars . . . Calling all cars* . . . I've been saying the same thing for some time now, in English of course, because they are all foreigners in this country, and they don't seem to understand Swedish.'

'Yes, dearest Aunt, it's very odd of them, I know, but you see, you must . . .'

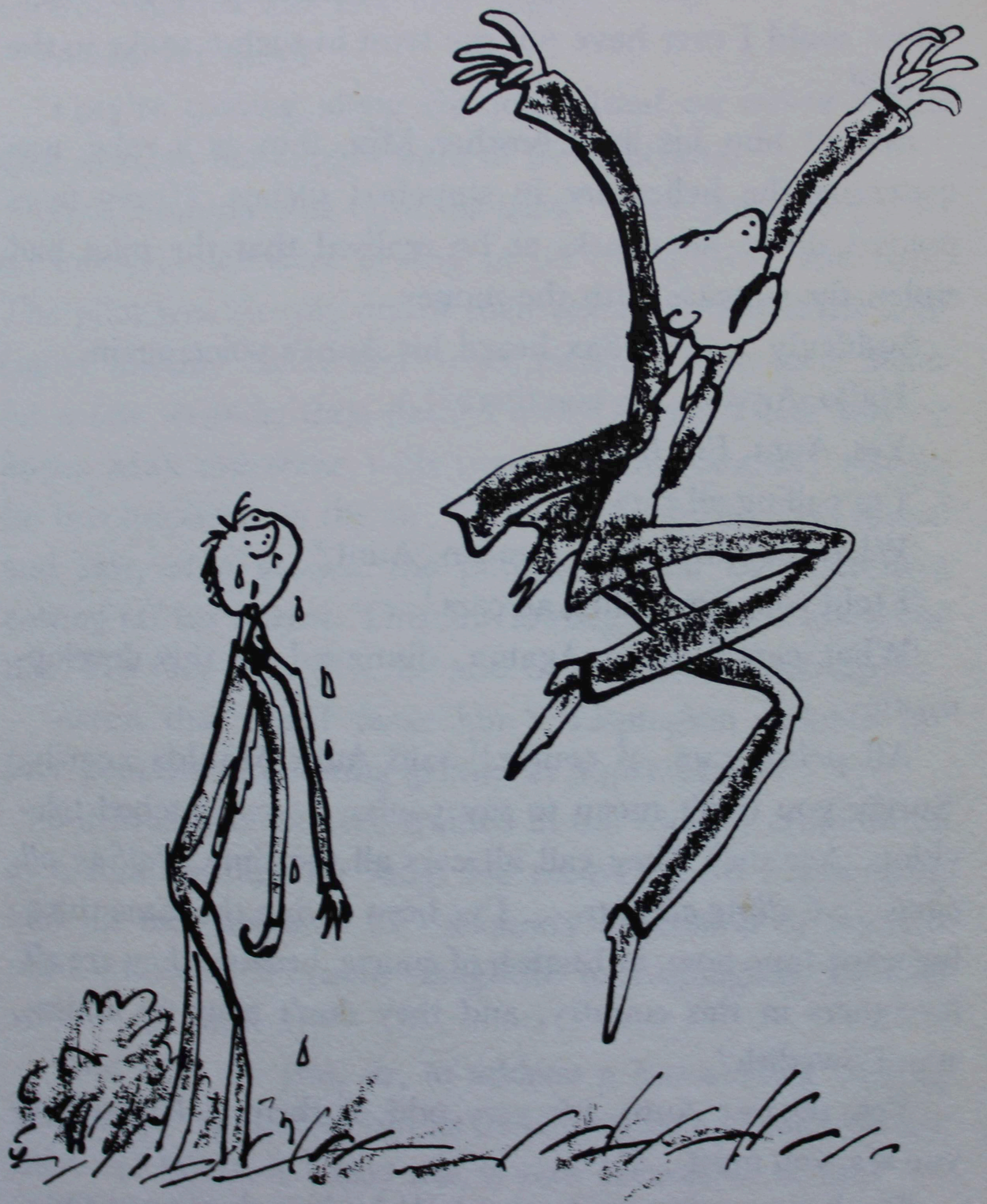
'Don't interrupt me, Agaton! We're in a dangerous situation, and we've got to be very careful!'

'Yes, Aunt, I know, but you really must . . .'

'Be quiet, Agaton! They can hear you!'

'Who?'

Agaton Sax and Lispington ran swiftly on to the lawn,



from where they could get a good view of the three thieves

'Look! That terribly thin man is running off, too! Everybody seems to be running away!'

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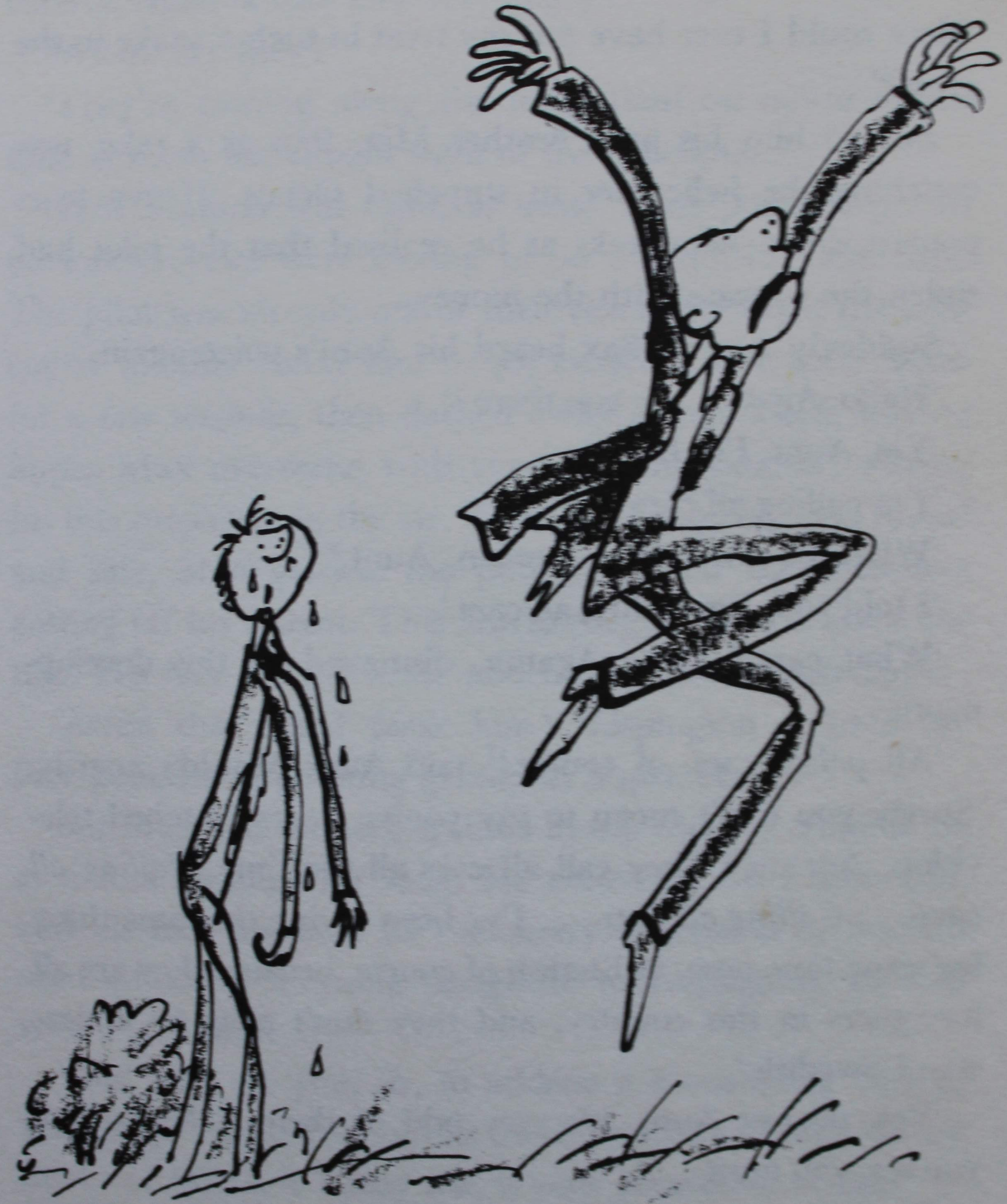


from where they could get a good view of the three thieves. The pilot had already taken off. The helicopter was soaring into the air only a few yards above Super Max, who was shaking his fist furiously at the traitor and leaping

'The one running away with the suit-case, of course.'

'That lady's mind is wandering,' murmured Lispington rather unfairly, since he didn't understand a word of Swedish.

'Over there!' said Aunt Matilda crossly. 'There he is again, the man who steered the plane. What a vicious person he was!'

'Where is he? I can't see him.'

'He's running across the lawn, still trampling on the flowers, too!'

'Did you say that he is running away with a suit-case?'

'Of course he is—a large travelling-bag. Looks as if he's trying to catch a train! Whoops! Now he's tripped up and fallen flat on his face. Serves him right!'

'Just a minute, Aunt! What's he doing now?'

'He's picked himself up and is dashing through the gate! Oh! The villain, he's making for the helicopter!'

'Oh first class! He's stolen the suit-case with the ten million pounds in it!' Agaton Sax whispered to Aunt Matilda.

Half a minute later, there was a roar of engines as the helicopter started up. Startled, Super Max looked up from his calculations. His face darkened, his eyes narrowed into two dangerous, threatening slits, he listened intently, realising that something terrible and unexpected was happening, then, cursing horribly, he threw the slip of paper on to the floor, rushed out of the door, and ran like a madman towards the helicopter.

'Look! There's another of them,' Aunt Matilda shouted into her microphone.

'Splendid! Couldn't be better,' said Agaton Sax. 'Stay where you are, Aunt! I'll soon come and set you free!'

His face was alight with joy, he ran to the door, opened it, and disappeared into the hall, locking the door after him.

'What do you think the paper said?' whispered Lisping-ton, burning with curiosity.

'We'll know in a few seconds,' said Agaton Sax. 'Ssh! Someone's coming!'

He was right, as usual. Once more, a key could be heard turning in the lock. This time, there was no doubt about the identity of the person entering the room. It was Super Max. He rubbed his hands together, took a piece of paper out of his pocket, put on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, and repeated under his breath a number of words, letters, and numbers.

Just as Super Max was beginning to feed the computer with the facts and figures he had prepared for it, Agaton Sax heard a very faint clicking sound in his breast-pocket. He realised at once what it meant. Aunt Matilda was estab-lishing radio contact with him! He had taught her how to handle a walkie-talkie, and she knew the wave-length on which she could always get in touch with her nephew. Now Agaton heard the well-known voice—feeble, but distinct:

'Hallo, Agaton! Are you there? Can you hear me? I saw you prowling around the park a few minutes ago! Answer me, Agaton!'

'Yes, Aunt, I'm here!' Agaton whispered into the micro-phone, crouching down so that Super Max would not hear his voice. 'Where are you, Aunt?'

'I'm on the second floor, third window to the right from where you are standing.'

'Excellent! I'll come at once!'

'But you must catch that blackguard first.'

'What blackguard?'

Agaton Sax climbed swiftly through the window. He glanced at the computer, as if to make sure that no harm had come to its delicate and intricate machinery. Then he set to work, turning numerous small wheels and pressing several buttons of various colours. Once or twice he flicked over the pages of the pocket table book that was an indispensable part of his equipment when working with Clever Dick.

'Excellent,' he murmured, smiling happily. 'Now, Mr Lispington, Clever Dick will look after things for us.'

He squeezed back through the window and joined Lispington, who whispered urgently to him : 'You got out in the nick of time, Agaton Sax. Look !'

The door was slowly opened again by someone coming in from the hall.

'Hold your breath ! Don't cough !' whispered Agaton Sax to Lispington, who actually was not feeling in the least like coughing, since it was a fine, warm morning.

It was not Super Max who was entering the room so cautiously. It was someone else, someone who first peered nervously round the door, then tiptoed quietly in, locked the door behind him, and put the key in his pocket. Then, with quick, firm steps he strode towards Clever Dick.

It was the pilot. Lispington had to bite his lip so as not to cry out in astonishment—but Agaton Sax nodded with the satisfied air of one who had expected this to happen all along.

Lost in thought the pilot stood for a moment in front of Clever Dick. Then, hesitantly, he pressed a few buttons. A slip of paper emerged from the computer. Eagerly he tore it off, read the message, and then thrust the paper into his pocket.

Super Max pressed a number of buttons, and 0·4 seconds later was reading out the answer from a slip of paper that it fed him : 30,008.

'Quite good, but also quite simple. Now, this time, my friends, watch very closely. I shall ask the machine how to get from Newcastle to Paris on a Wednesday morning in November? I know the answer already, because I've consulted a travel agency. Watch. I have to press a combination of 23 figures and letters—and here comes the answer—absolutely correct, upon my word! Ah, Agaton Sax is indeed a man of genius! An extremely disagreeable person, mind you, dangerous, sly, insidious, treacherous, he represents all that is base and untrustworthy—and yet, a man of great genius!'

Mix and the pilot stood there gazing at Super Max in silent admiration. Agaton Sax, outside the window, seemed to grow an inch or two as he listened to Super Max's speech.

'And now, gentlemen,' continued Super Max, 'I am looking forward to receiving the answers to two most important and pertinent questions which I will put to the machine. But this has to be a secret between the machine and myself, so we shall all leave the room and lock the door after us. I shall study the wording of these vital questions in absolute privacy in another room and then write them down. Will you lead the way, please.'

He pushed the others in front of him through the door. All three disappeared and the door was locked from the outside.

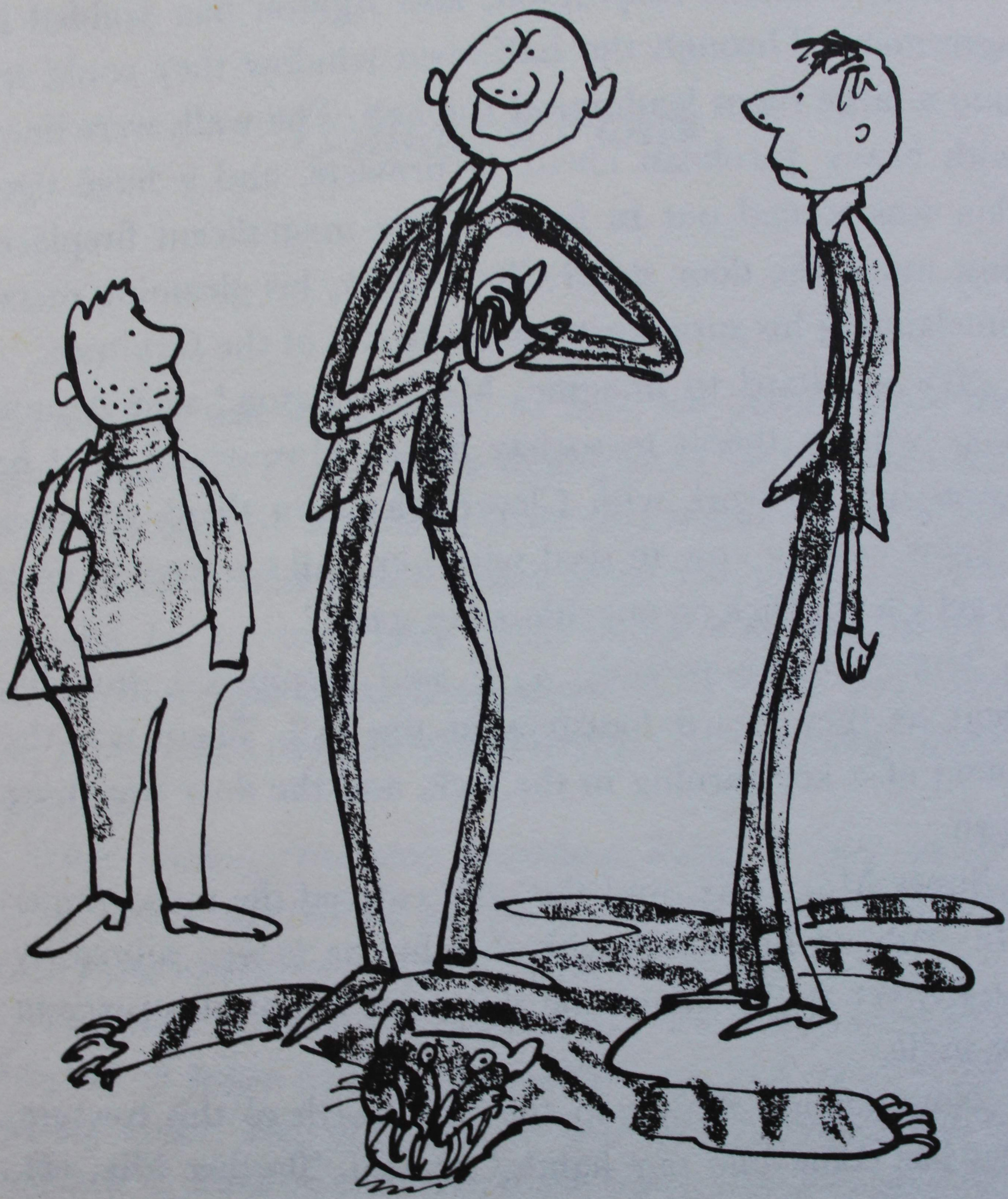
Agaton Sax quietly put his hand on Lispington's arm.

'Now, Mr Lispington, it's our turn,' he whispered. 'I'll have a word or two with Clever Dick, and then he'll be on our side again. Just wait here, I'll be back in a second.'

'1,665,444.'

'Splendid! Divide 1,665,444 by 555. What would be your answer?'

'I've no idea. We never had to do that kind of arithmetic when I was at school.'



'I'm not surprised. The educational system of our country was never noted for its efficiency. Slackness and incompetence on all sides, as far as I can remember. Well, we must appeal to our machine then.'

'1,665,444.'

'Splendid! Divide 1,665,444 by 555. What would be your answer?'

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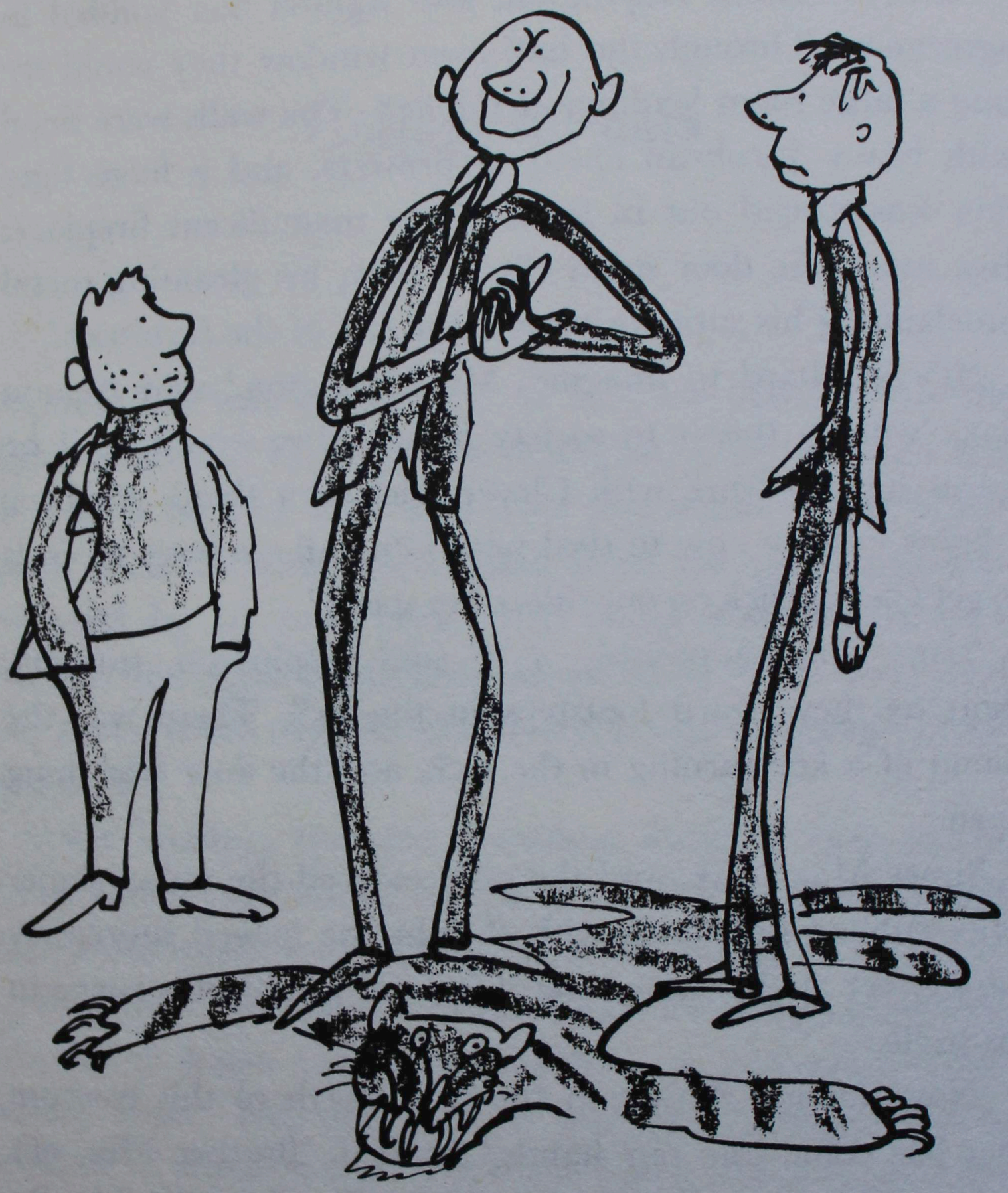


'I'm not surprised. The educational system of our country was never noted for its efficiency. Slackness and incompetence on all sides, as far as I can remember. Well, we must appeal to our machine then.'

floor. There would be no point in trying to carry him upstairs.'

They peered cautiously through one of the windows. The room was empty. No sign of Clever Dick, or anyone else for that matter. They tried the next window.

'There!' hissed Lispington, and Agaton Sax nodded in agreement. Through the half-open window they could see into a large room leading off the hall. The walls were lined with heavy Jacobean chests of drawers, and a huge tiger skin was spread out in front of the magnificent fireplace. Just inside the door stood Clever Dick, his gleaming metal proclaiming his superiority over the rest of the furniture.

'It's not hard to imagine, Mr Lispington,' said Agaton Sax, 'what a threat to society Super Max would be if he learnt how to work with Clever Dick. But thank goodness I know exactly how to deal with him. All we have to do is to get Clever Dick on our side, so to speak.'

'How can we possibly . . . ?' said Lispington, stopping short as they heard footsteps in the hall. There was the sound of a key turning in the lock, and the door was flung open.

Super Max, Mix, and the pilot entered the room. Super Max rubbed his hands with delight; he looked supremely happy, yet at the same time there was a hint of menace in his smile.

'Now, let me show you the true worth of this treasure that has come into our hands,' he said. 'Brother Mix, are you ready for my new trick? I call it "The Great Division".'

'Anything you say, brother Max.'

'Splendid! Then, my dear brother, would you be so kind as to think of a number consisting of seven figures and tell me the number you are thinking of?'

9

Calling all cars

Agaton Sax was anxious not to land his plane before the right moment. Through his field-glasses he watched the helicopter land on a lawn in front of a manor house which stood some hundred yards back from the road, and surrounded by its own park. The house was Wollecombe Manor, and Agaton Sax knew all about it, for he had found out all he could since he discovered it was the gang's headquarters.

After landing, the two detectives found a hole in the fence which surrounded the park, crawled through it, and cautiously made their way towards the house.

The place seemed deserted, and so uncannily quiet that Lispington began to wonder whether they had come to the wrong house. But suddenly, as they moved quietly from window to window, they heard a murmur of voices, and the unmistakable rustle made by someone counting out thousand-pound notes.

'First of all, we must find out where they have hidden Clever Dick,' whispered Agaton Sax. 'As he weighs 432 pounds, I think the chances are he will be on the ground

Agaton Sax broke off and put his field-glasses to his eyes.

'They're going to land,' he said grimly. 'In a few hours we'll have Super Max and Mix under lock and key.'

'What about the rest of the gang?'

'He has disbanded them.'

'Disbanded them?'

'Yes. There are twenty-four of them in all. If I understand correctly—and I'm sure I do—Super Max is very keen on retiring to a life of peaceful prosperity—now that he thinks himself in possession of at least £444,999,855. He has no need of assistants any longer, and would never employ anyone unnecessarily as he is dead against paying insurance contributions, sickness benefits, pensions or anything like that. So he has sent them off on various faked assignments. When they return—no doubt very angry—they will find him gone, disappeared, vanished into thin air. And nobody will be able to find him—so he thinks.'

'What a scoundrel!' exploded Lispington.

Police for unlawful sojourning on the roof of train!' exclaimed Lispington furiously.

'Never mind, everything will be O.K.'

'But how did they manage the coup they pulled off a few minutes ago?'

'Very simple. Super Max realised that if his brothers unscrewed the lid they could easily squeeze themselves through the ventilator on the roof of the luggage-van. Mox went down to collect the money, but as you know he had a stroke of bad luck when his air-pump accidentally set itself off and he was blown up to his inflated size; consequently, he couldn't squeeze himself back through the ventilator on to the roof.'

'But what about the crime that started the whole affair, the theft at the Bank of England? They stole one million pounds, didn't they—leaving only one tiny hair behind? How did they do it?'

'Well, I'm sorry to say it was quite simple. Try and picture the inside of the armoured van in which the newly printed banknotes were carried from the Printers to the Bank? In a corner of the van, you remember, hung a tattered green overcoat. Behind this coat, the thin Mox, or perhaps the thin Mix, hid himself. He had with him the forged banknotes, which Super Max had printed himself. So Mox—let's suppose it was Mox—was in the van all the time, behind the green coat, and unnoticed. The genuine notes were carried into the van, the door was secured, the van drove off. During the journey from the Printers to the Bank of England Mox substituted the forged ones for the genuine ones. Then he hid behind the green coat again, and after the delivery had been completed, sneaked off with the genuine notes.'

out the air just as fast as they can pump it in. And that's what they did in the barrels. You see, as soon as they had squeezed themselves into the barrels and Super Max had fastened down the lids, they let the air out of their suits, crawled through tiny doors at the backs of the barrels, changed places, and blew themselves up again. When they disappeared for good, they ran to my office and stole the hair from the little box.'

'But what about the time when Super Max moved from the stage to the back stalls of the cinema. How do you account for that?' asked Lispington, who had been listening with a mixture of bitterness and incredulity to Agaton Sax's revelations.

'The Super Max we saw for a couple of seconds standing in the back row of the cinema was not Super Max—it was either Mix or Mox, dressed up.'

'But the false guard? You said I was the only one, do you mean the other was real?'

'No. It was Mox. Mox in his own shape, but dressed up as a German guard.'

'But when he disappeared where did he go? And Mix too?'

'Through the window. Thanks to their almost supernatural slenderness, they could even squeeze themselves out of those narrow train windows.'

'But once they were outside, where did they go then?'

'They climbed on to the roof of the train. Don't forget they are unsurpassed acrobats, who have won gold and silver medals in Amsterdam, Osnaburgh, Munster, and lots of other places. They stayed on the roof until the helicopter came to collect them both, and Super Max.'

'Damn it! I could have reported them to the German

'Yes, but that was only Mox.'

'Mox! That's absurd, Mr Sax! You can't have forgotten that Mox is at least three times as fat as the false guard!'

'Of course, and that's the very thing that proves the truth of my statement.'

'But it doesn't account for all the mysterious disappearances!'

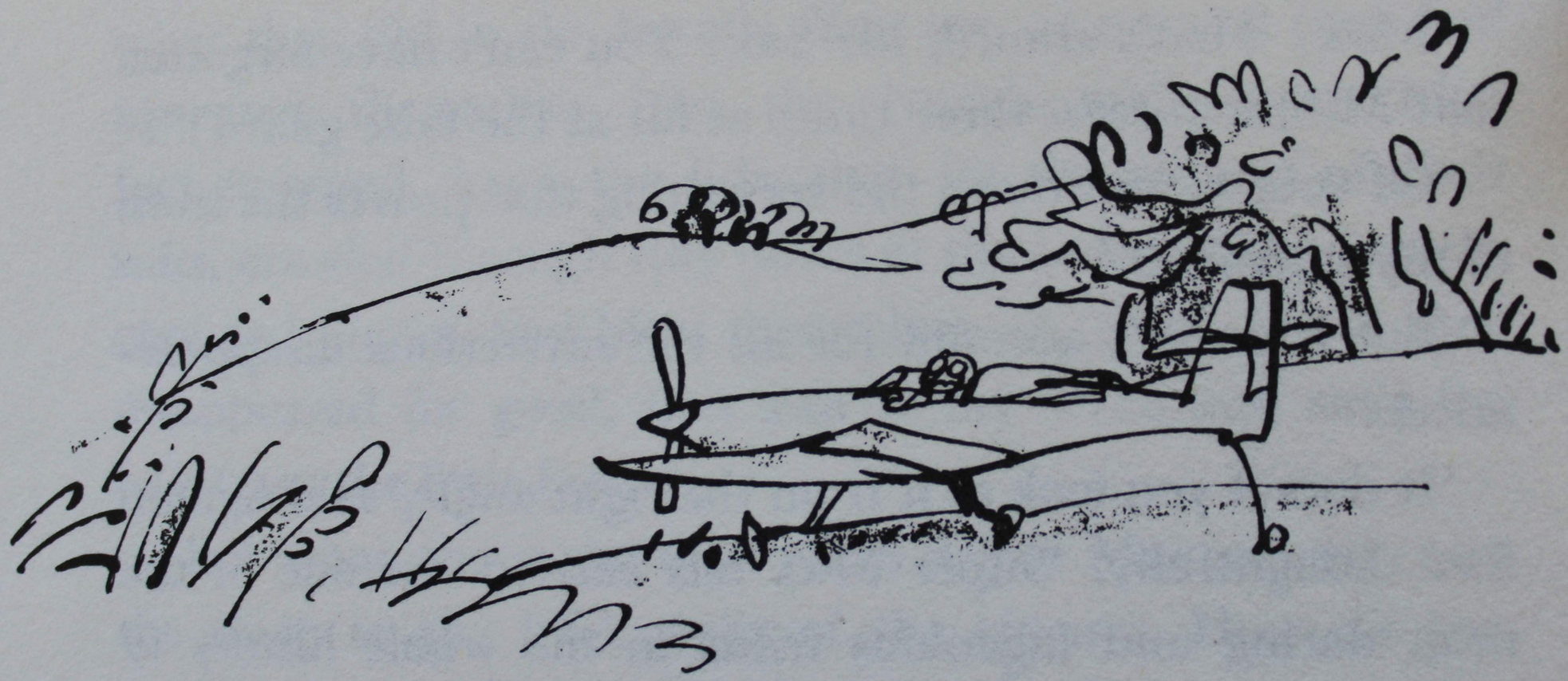
'It does if you look at it from the right angle,' said Agaton Sax thoughtfully. 'Super Max has carried out one of the most daring and ingenious tricks in the whole history of Disguise and Transformation. Only thanks to my perspicacity has he now—most fortunately—been unmasked.'

'I see,' said Lispington tartly. 'And now perhaps you would be good enough to tell me what you are talking about?'

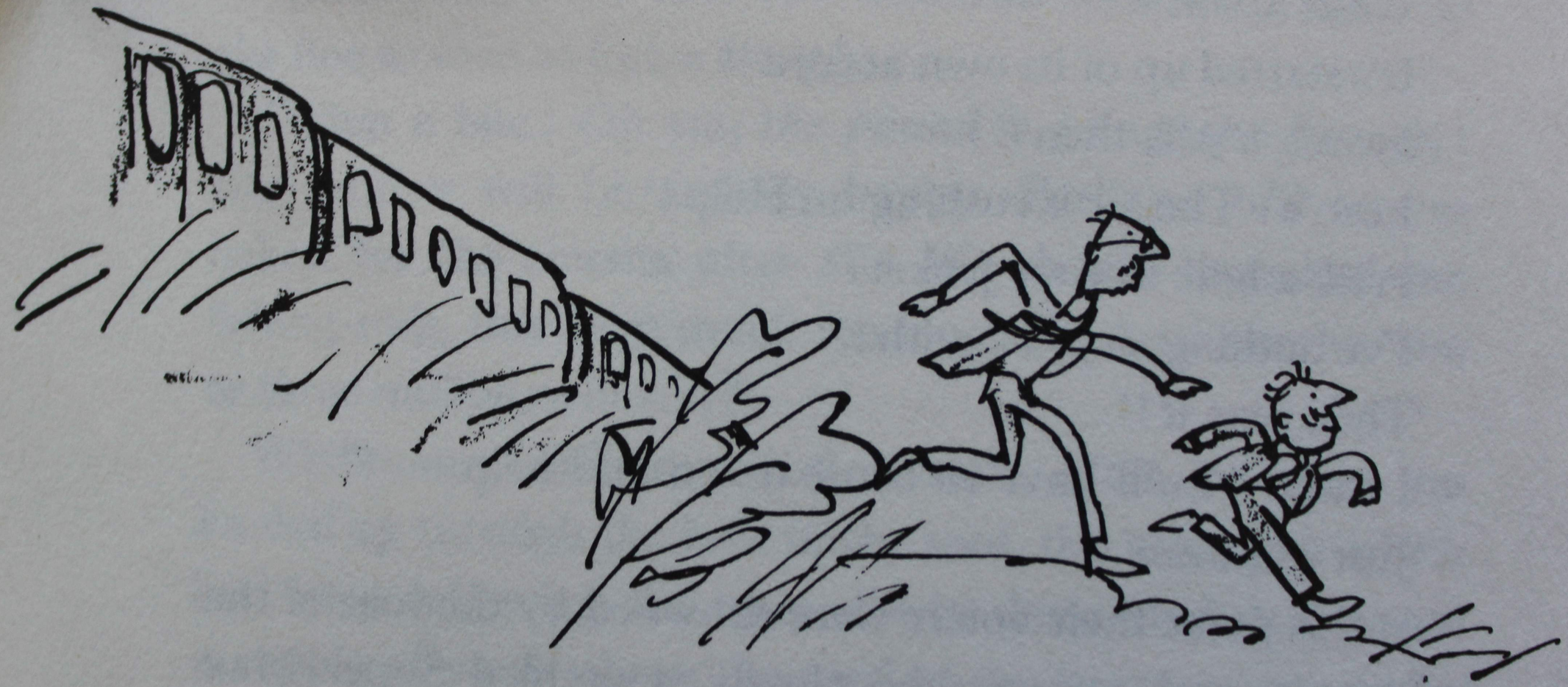
'My suspicions about Super Max were aroused when I first read of his conjuring tricks in a German newspaper,' Agaton Sax said—with great dignity. 'I immediately realised what lay behind the trick of the two fat men in the barrels. Both of them, Mox and Mix, were—inflated.'

'Inflated? How do you mean?'

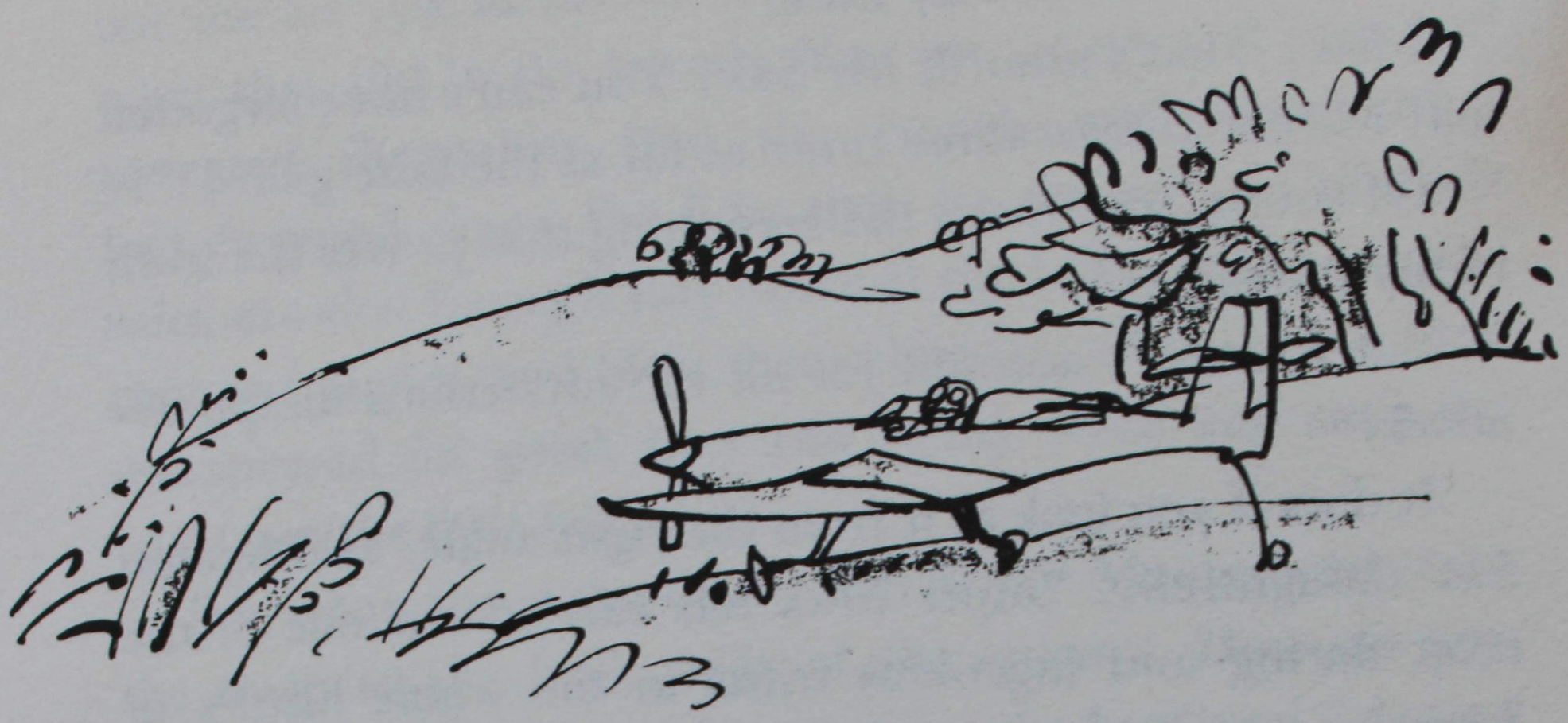
'I mean it literally. You see, Mox and Mix are really exceptionally thin men. They are skilled contortionists, measuring only ten inches across the shoulders and nine inches across the hips. Super Max himself devised and designed inflatable suits for them. With the help of an electric air pump the brothers can blow up their suits in a matter of seconds, thus producing the barrel-like appearance which has enabled them to take in audiences all over Europe and bring down the house wherever they go. These suits are, as you can appreciate having seen them, masterpieces of pneumatic tailoring. When necessary Mox and Mix can let



It was the helicopter, 6,000 feet beneath them and holding a steady Westerly course.



Everything that had happened had been foreseen by Agaton Sax, and he had carefully planned the whole opera-



It was the helicopter, 6,000 feet beneath them and holding a steady Westerly course.

'We must maintain our greater speed but not quite let them out of sight,' said Agaton Sax. 'If we pace them exactly they will soon become suspicious. When we have got so far ahead that there is a risk of our losing them, we'll turn and try to make them think that we are another plane. Take another look at the helicopter, Lispington. You do recognise it, don't you?'

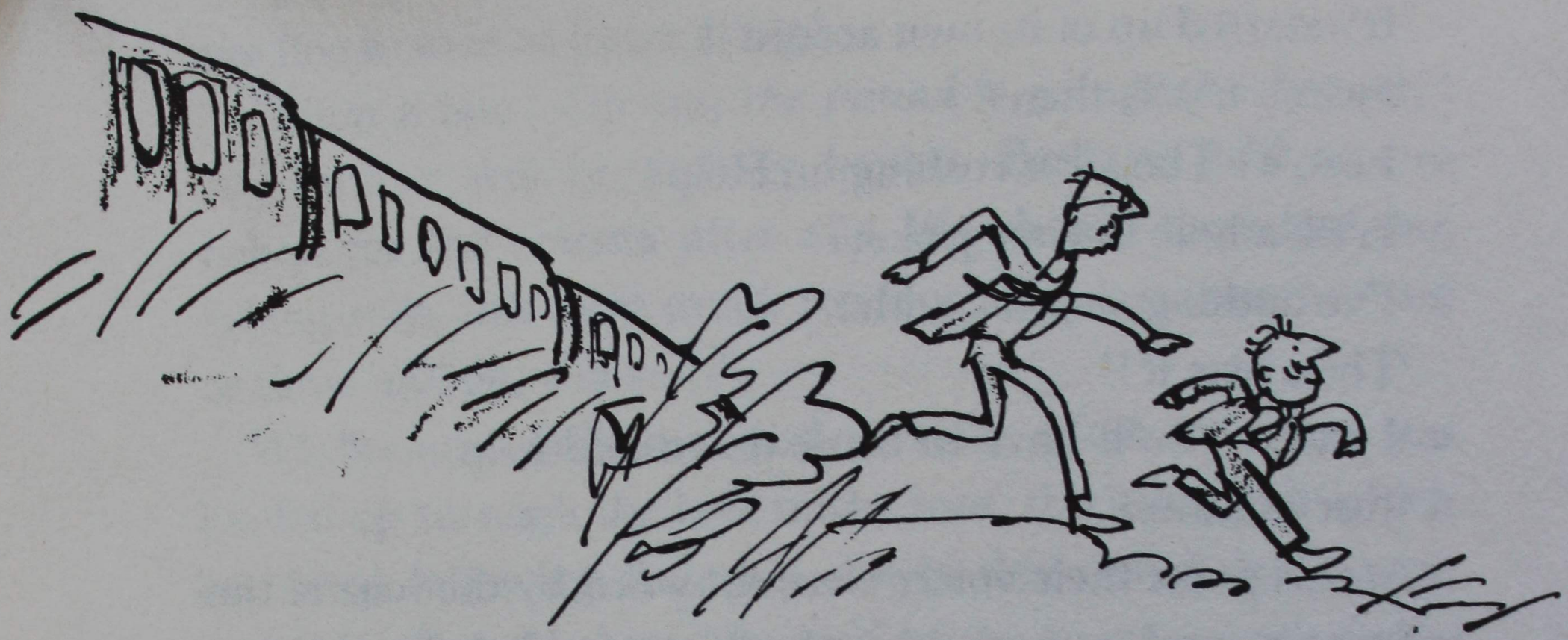
'Of course not! Why should I?'

'Because it's the one that collected Super Max from the train in Germany. And not only him, the other two as well. That's how they disappeared from the train so mysteriously.'

'What do you mean?'

'Exactly what I say. But perhaps I had better begin from the beginning. You were the only false guard on the train, Lispington.'

'But I saw the other one, so did you.'



Everything that had happened had been foreseen by Agaton Sax, and he had carefully planned the whole operation. The light aircraft he had commissioned was twice as fast as the helicopter, and its pilot was an expert on difficult landings; indeed he was renowned for being able to put his plane down anywhere, no matter how rough the ground or small the space available.

The two detectives made a dash for the plane—first, naturally, Agaton Sax, followed, as usual, by Inspector Lispington. A minute later the plane took off.

Agaton Sax was not in the least worried about Aunt Matilda. He was absolutely sure that she was being held prisoner by Super Max, who would not risk doing her any harm.

They were flying at about 18,000 feet. The sky was clear and visibility was good. Agaton Sax and Lispington were both scanning the horizon through their field-glasses.

'There!' exclaimed Agaton Sax suddenly, pointing excitedly.

'What about it?'

'It's started up of its own accord!'

'Switch it off, then!'

'I can't! The air is rushing in. Help!'

'Prick a hole in your jacket!'

'I've nothing to prick with!'

'Then tear it!'

'I can't. You'll have to come down and help me!'

'Just a minute!'

At this point their voices were drowned by the roar of the helicopter, and a man who closely resembled Super Max leaned out, shouting an order to Mix, who was just tying a loop in the neck of the potato sack into which he had stuffed the bank-notes. A rope with a big hook on the end was lowered from the helicopter, Mix put the loop over the hook, and a second later the sack with the bank-notes was safely on board. Agile as a monkey, Mix climbed the ladder and disappeared inside the cabin.

But of Mox there was no sign. He was left behind in the luggage-van, and as the roar of the helicopter died away, Agaton Sax and Lispington heard him hurling insults, curses and threats after his brothers, who with treacherous cowardliness had so vilely left him in the lurch.

'Now!' Agaton Sax shouted, giving the communication cord a sharp tug. With a terrible grinding of brakes the train came to a halt, and at the same moment a small aeroplane landed in a field beside the track. It had been circling about 15,000 feet above the train all the time. The pilot had followed the course of the helicopter through powerful field-glasses, and knew the exact direction in which it had headed after leaving the train. All airfields within an area of ten miles had been warned to be on the look-out for it.

'O.K. Here's the first two hundred thousand. Haul up the line as soon as I give a tug.'

'What a bite! Oh yes, *the pound is going up*—literally! Big brother will be awfully happy. Perhaps he'll buy us tickets for the cinema after all! We should have had two fishing-rods, this takes much too long. Hook on another two or three million, will you?'

Whilst one million-pound bundle after another was hauled up through the hole in the roof, the helicopter which had been following the train slowly descended. It hovered a couple of yards above the roof of the luggage-van, and a stout rope-ladder was let down from a trapdoor in its side.

'Last pound coming up!' Mox shouted jubilantly from inside the van.

'Great! Come on up yourself then, and look sharp.' Mix put his mouth to the hole in the roof and shouted into it.

'Right! I'll take the . . . Hang on! Just a second!'

'What's happened? Get a move on!'

'Help!'

'What is it?'

'That's just it, I don't know!'

'Then what are you fussing about?'

'It must be . . . Aaaah!'

If Agaton Sax and Lispington had had a good amplifier on their microphone at this dramatic moment they would have been able to hear a faint wheezing sound.

'You numbskull, why aren't you coming up?' Mix shouted again.

'Because I can't!'

'Why can't you?'

'Because of the electric valve pump!' Mox shouted back from the depths of the luggage-van.

'How can you be careful when you are trying to handle a fishing-rod on the roof of a train going at 90 miles an hour?' Mix retorted, with some justification.

After this exchange Agaton Sax and Lispington heard no more from the brothers for about three and a half minutes.

'What the devil are they up to?' Lispington asked impatiently, at the same time glancing anxiously at his wrist-watch.

'They're probably baiting their hooks.'

Suddenly a metallic scraping noise came from the microphone, so piercing that it hurt their ears.

'Ha!' said Agaton Sax. 'One of them is breaking into the armoured van now. You heard them unscrew the lid of the ventilation pipe on the roof of the van. One of the brothers is squeezing through the hole.'

'O.K.,' said Mox. 'I'm through.'

'Can you see the trunk?'

'You bet I can! I'll force it open right away.'

Lispington tugged at Agaton Sax's right sleeve. 'This is it. We must arrest them. It's now or never!'

'No,' said Agaton Sax. 'Not now. You see, Lispington, if we act now we'll only get the small fry: the codlings and the tiddlers. But we want the big fish: the whales and the sharks. Understand?'

They could hear Mox battling wtih the lock and struggling to open the trunk. Panting and grunting he could certainly be said to be working by the sweat of his brow. At last, triumphantly, he called out:

'Got it! Ten million pounds! We're not just rich, we're super-rich!'

'Shut up and hurry up! Big brother is coming. I can hear him already. I'll let down the line.'

'And the fish-hook?'

'Sure. Newly ground by Smith & Smith, Tackle Specialists, New Bond Street.'

'What number is it?'

'In Bond Street?'

'No, fathead! The number of the hook!'

'3.'

'That's O.K.'

Lispington leapt up from his seat, beside himself with frustrated fury.

'This is sheer madness!' he exclaimed. 'Are they going fishing on a train? I can't stand it!'

'Wait a minute, old chap,' said Agaton Sax. 'They're going to fish all right, but not the way you think. I've seen through their little game. Let's just hang on a minute.'

The curious, faint hissing noise could still be heard coming from the other compartment. Either Mix or Mox had opened the window, so that the two detectives could hear the rattle of the wheels and the rushing of the wind. Agaton Sax put out a hand to hold Lispington back as he tried to dash out into the corridor.

'It's exactly seven minutes past six,' said Mox. 'Here we go.'

'O.K.'

'Oh! Damn!'

'What's the matter?'

'The hook!'

'What about the hook?'

'I got hooked by the hook.'

'Hooked—what do you mean?'

'On the end of the line. The hook got caught in my arm.'

'Then be more careful!'

'So in a few minutes it will be 445 million pounds.'
'That's right. Minus the 145 pounds he owes us.'
'That'll leave him some 444,999,855 pounds, then.'
'That's right.'

In the first compartment of the coach in front of the armoured luggage-van there were just two passengers, both of them somewhat suspicious-looking. One was Mox, the other, naturally, Mix. In order to make certain they would not be disturbed they had reserved all the seats in the compartment. Agaton Sax, anticipating that they would want to use this compartment as their 'operations room', had concealed a microphone behind the hat-rack. Another microphone was hidden in the luggage-van. Thus Lispington and Agaton Sax could hear every single word the brothers uttered.

Lispington was on tenter-hooks. Suddenly he whispered:

'What was that?'

Agaton Sax listened. A faint noise could be heard coming from the loud-speaker in his hand.

'It's either Mix or Mox—I can't be sure which—drumming nervously on the arm of the seat with the forefinger and middle-finger of his right hand,' he said.

A moment later they heard Mox ask his brother:

'What's the time?'

'Half a minute later than when you asked me the last time,' answered Mix. 'Four and a half minutes past six.'

'Only a few more minutes, then.'

'Yes. Nothing can stop the minutes ticking away.'

'Is that true?'

'Yes.'

Silence. Then Mix said:

'How much dough do you think our big brother's worth now?'

'When he was counting it up on the kitchen table last week it was about 435 million pounds.'

'So in a few minutes it will be 445 million pounds.'

'That's right. Minus the 145 pounds he owes us.'

'That'll leave him some 444,999,855 pounds, then.'

'That's right.'

There was silence again. Lispington and Agaton Sax looked at their watches.

Agaton Sax got up and cautiously peered out of the window. High up in the sky, hardly visible, a helicopter was following the train.

'He can start his descent now,' Agaton Sax murmured enigmatically.

Almost at once they heard the two brothers again.

'Are you ready?'

'Yes.'

'Here we go, then. I'll open the valves.'

A faint hissing sound was heard. Lispington stared at Agaton Sax, who nodded, indicating that there was nothing to worry about and everything was going according to plan.

'Have you got the fishing-line?' Mox asked.

'You bet. The best nylon line that money can buy.'

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8

Fishing for a fortune

The London to Newcastle express (Engine No. 684) sped through the early morning mists. It was 6.01, that peaceful hour when cows in the fields are just beginning to savour their first meal of the day.

There were only a few passengers on the train. One of them was Agaton Sax, another Mr Lispington. The night before they had conferred at length about the best way of tackling the task that lay ahead of them. Lispington was all for disguising himself, and favoured a mountaineering outfit. Complete with rope, boots and ice pick, he would be ready for an ascent of 12,000 feet or more. However, after a long discussion Agaton Sax had persuaded him that no disguise would be necessary, he did not foresee a face-to-face encounter with the enemy.

The coach immediately in front of theirs was a small armoured luggage-van which could only be opened by a specially transistorised skeleton key, or failing that a few sticks of gelignite—or, of course, by Agaton Sax himself. Standing in this luggage-van was a green trunk, securely locked. It contained 10,000 10,000-pound notes. Total value—(work it out)—10 million pounds.

Nervously he had tried out all the buttons and levers on the instrument panel, and then, just as Agaton Sax had hoped, started the engine. For, to tell you the truth, everything was going according to Agaton Sax's very cunning plan. He had unlocked the door deliberately in order to give the pilot a chance to start the plane and get away. But —strangely enough—he had overlooked Aunt Matilda's knitting. So had the pilot, and once again he found he had no time to chase her off the plane. Reluctantly he had to accept the fact that she would be keeping him company on yet another flight. He slammed the door and dashed back to the cockpit.

Lispington started forward, but Agaton Sax gently restrained him.

'Don't worry,' he said, 'with Aunt Matilda and Clever Dick aboard, we have no cause for alarm.'

orders that there's to be another big strike tomorrow morning between six and seven. Have you any ideas about what sort of strike it will be?'

Lispington thought deeply, then shook his head.

'None at all, I'm afraid. Perhaps the Secret Strike Department can help.'

'There is only one strike we need to bother about,' said Agaton Sax firmly, ignoring Lispington's suggestion. 'From my researches into the ways of the British Banking Administration, British Transport and the Royal Mint, I know that once a week ten million pounds in newly printed notes are transported from the Bank of England to Newcastle by train. They always use the same train, Engine No. 684, and it leaves London at 5.50 every Monday morning. Tomorrow is Monday.'

'I see,' said Lispington. 'What do you intend to do?'

'First of all, we shall need a light aircraft, very fast and able to land on a sixpence.'

'I can arrange that.'

'Good. Then we must...' Agaton Sax stopped dead in the middle of his sentence, and called out: 'Aunt Matilda! Where is my Aunt?'

Lispington turned pale, and pointed to the plane. Simultaneously, they caught a glimpse of Aunt Matilda's coat disappearing into the plane, and heard her exclaim:

'My knitting! I forgot my knitting! For all I know that fool is stupid enough to be unravelling it!'

At the same moment Lispington called out:

'Look! Look what's happening! The plane is moving!'

And so it was! The whole thing was over in a few seconds. The pilot had realised, as he was meant to, that the pantry door was unlocked and dashed to the cockpit.

one lead here and disconnected another one there, and finally went over to the pantry door.

'Keep quiet for a minute, my friend,' he said to the pilot, who was banging furiously on the inside of the door. 'You know who I am? I am Agaton Sax, and you are Charlie Sock, aren't you?' Let me tell you just what you've been up to. You had orders from your boss to fly to Bykoping in Sweden, shadowing the plane Scotland Yard had sent to fetch my computer. When you got to Bykoping, you ambushed the pilot, locked him up, and then tried to make my Aunt believe that *you* were Scotland Yard's man. What folly, only an idiot could have persuaded himself that she would walk into such a clumsy trap! Still, you've already had plenty of time to regret your mistake, and you'll have plenty more in a somewhat bigger cell!'

The pilot, almost choking with fright and fury, was making such a racket that he failed to hear Agaton Sax turn the key in the lock.

'I'll be back in a couple of minutes,' he called as he left the plane.

Lispington was waiting impatiently for him.

'Right, we'll go and get him,' Lispington said, stepping forward.

'Just a minute, Mr Lispington,' Agaton Sax said. 'Has anything struck you?'

'No, why should it?'

'Hasn't it struck you that Super Max and his gang are likely to strike again very soon?'

'Where? When?'

'I'll tell you. In the cockpit I found a scrap of paper, on which the pilot had written down orders he had received from his boss. It was not difficult to deduce from the pilot's

'Just so. Now we'll try it the other way round—Z into X and X into Y. Right? Then the aircraft will descend 2 × 975 yards = 1950 yards.'

To the enormous astonishment and relief of the others the plane immediately came down 1950 yards. Agaton Sax began to issue orders again, orders for climbing, descending, banking to the right, banking to the left and so on. Everything went according to plan.

'Gentlemen, if you will be kind enough to supply me with all the facts I need, as I ask for them, I will bring this aircraft down in the next few minutes.'

He kept his promise. Five minutes later Aunt Matilda made a perfect landing on Runway XB. The four men hurried across to the plane, Agaton Sax and Lispington leading the way.

'Bother! I must have dropped a stitch when we landed,' Aunt Matilda said irritably, as she emerged. 'And all because of that clumsy fool,' she added, nodding towards the pantry.

Agaton Sax held Lispington back, saying that he would prefer to enter the plane alone. He climbed into the cockpit, and at once found just what he had expected to find: a small scrap of paper. He picked it up and read the following words:

DEPARTYER FROM WOLCUM MANNER WITH ELLICOPTA AT 5.45 FETCH AT 6.20 BE BACK OME AT 7.00.

Agaton Sax put the paper back where he had found it, and turned his attention to Clever Dick. He pulled one or two levers, pressed a number of buttons, referred to his pocket book of logarithms and circuit diagrams, connected

'I'm now going to demonstrate that my computer and your automatic pilot can co-operate,' Agaton Sax said to Mr Dodds, the radio operator and the radar man, who were continuously feeding him with data about height, speed, air-pressure, wind force, temperature and so on.

'If Aunt Matilda does exactly what I tell her the first stage will bring the aircraft down 975 yards.'

He gave the necessary instructions to his Aunt. There was deathly silence in the room as the four men watched the aircraft's movements on the radar screen.

'What on earth? Look!—she's *climbing,*' Mr Dodds exclaimed.

Agaton Sax was as white as a sheet.

'What's gone wrong?' shouted the man at the radar screen desperately.

Agaton Sax did not answer. He was thinking. This time his proverbial presence of mind was really being put to the test. Without doubt Aunt Matilda had never been in a more dangerous situation. How long would the aircraft go on climbing? And how could he possibly bring it to the ground if it insisted on going up rather than down?

Suddenly Mr Dodds called out:

'Look! She's stopped climbing.'

'How much did she go up?' Agaton Sax asked.

'Exactly 975 yards,' said the radar man.

'That's all right, I know what's wrong,' Agaton Sax permitted himself a sigh of relief and then became once again his usual self, calm and composed. 'Aunt,' he said, 'you made a slight mistake! You plugged X into Z and Y into X—didn't you?'

'Yes, of course, Agaton, that's what you told me to do!'

'Just so. Now we'll try it the other way round—Z into X and X into Y. Right? Then the aircraft will descend 2 × 975 yards = 1950 yards.'

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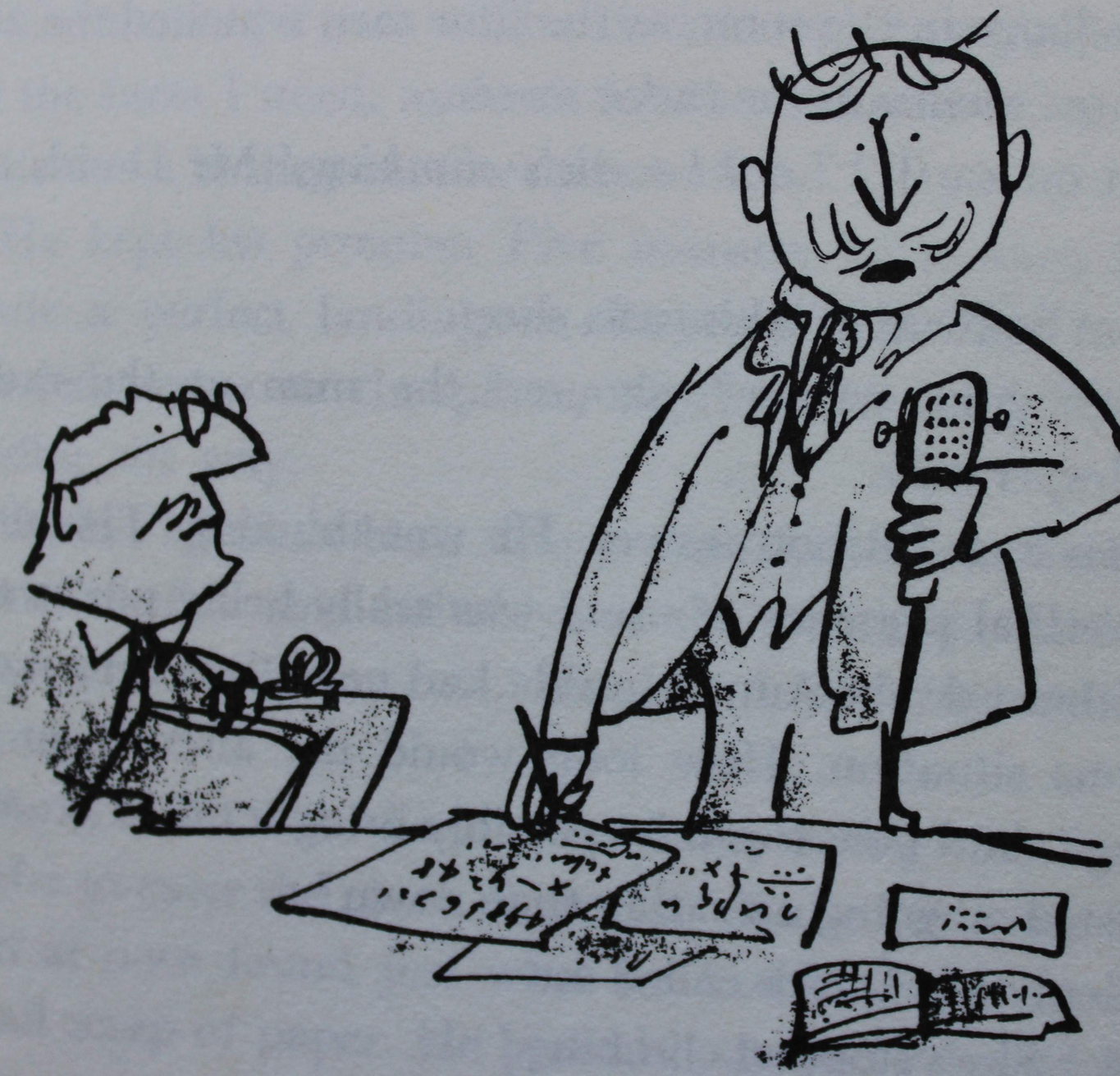

'I know, Aunt, so I'll have two

'Agaton, you never had your omelette last Friday!'

'Never mind, Aunt! Now, you press the . . .'

'You disappeared so suddenly that I hadn't time to make it.'

'Don't worry, Aunt. Next Friday, I'll . . .'

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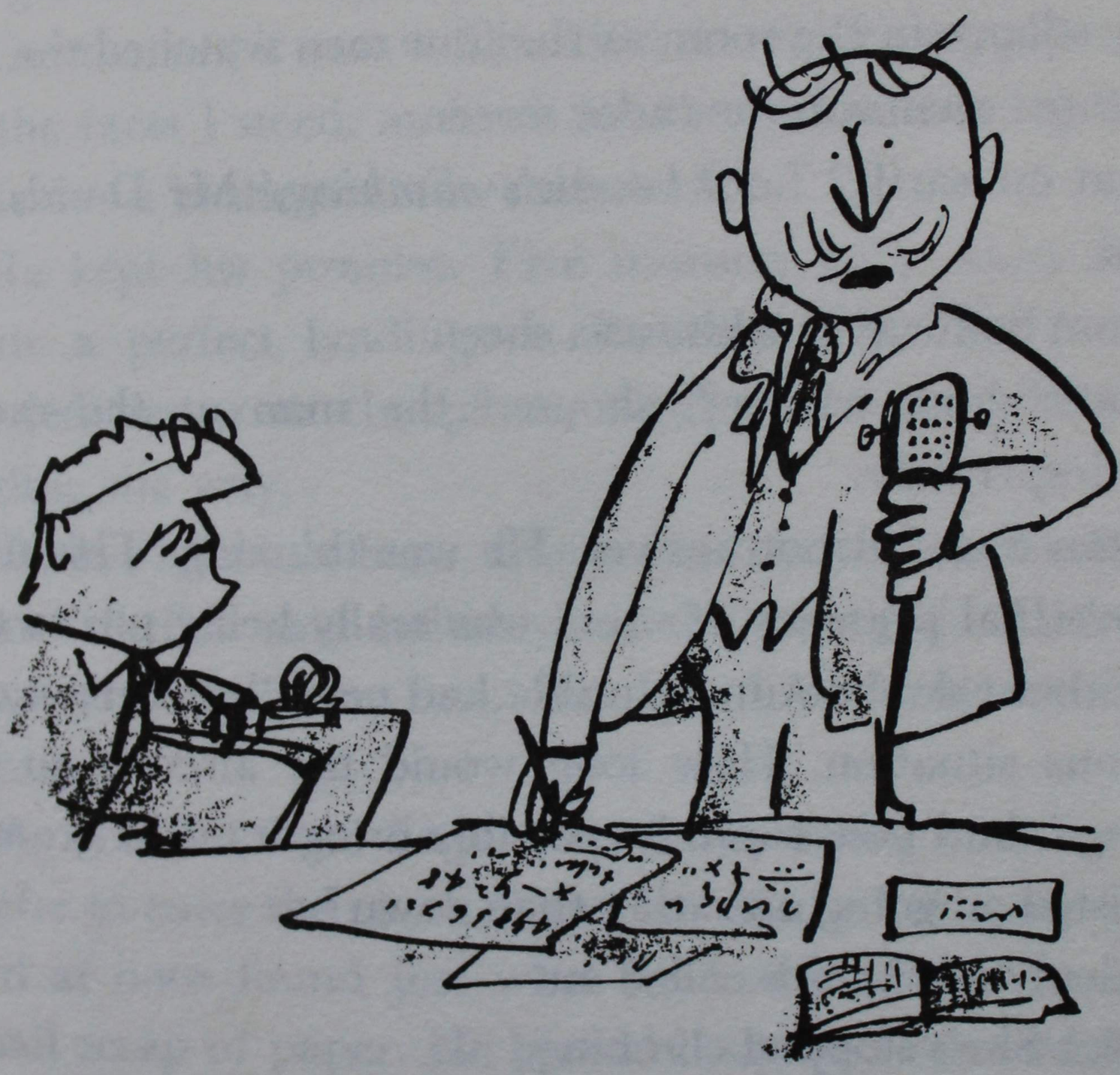

'I know, Aunt, so I'll have two omelettes next Friday and then it will be twice as cheap. Now, if you press the buttons marked 2, 7, 4, 3 and 1, and then find the letters O-M-E-L-E-T-T . . . No, stop, what am I saying? I mean the letters C-Y-B-E-R-N. Can you see them?'

Patiently Agaton Sax dictated his elaborate instructions to Aunt Matilda who, just as patiently, took down the string of figures, letters, plus signs and minus signs.

shoulders. 'I'm really very sorry, but I knew this would happen. You see I know her and you don't. She will never change her mind. Gentlemen—I must tell you that, assisted by Clever Dick, I intend to talk the plane down myself.'

The others were completely dazed by this decision. Only Lispington knew Agaton Sax well enough to understand what he had in mind, but this didn't stop him from looking as dismayed as the others.

'Give me all the data you've got on this plane,' Agaton Sax asked Mr Dodds.

As soon as he had what he wanted, he studied the figures intently for a few minutes and then embarked on a complicated calculation which took him another three minutes; once or twice he broke off to give instructions to Aunt Matilda. Finally he looked up, satisfied with his figures.

'Now,' he said, 'I'm ready.'

His voice had in it a note of authority that demanded respect even from Aunt Matilda. There was complete silence.

'Aunt,' he said, 'we are now going to land the plane. You must do exactly what I tell you, without argument. First connect Clever Dick to the automatic pilot. There ought to be three flexes, marked X, Y and Z, at the back on the right-hand side. There are? Good. Pull them out. Now push the plugs at the ends of these flexes into the sockets marked X, Y and Z which you will see in the small box in the left-hand corner at the bottom of the computer. Do you follow? Good. Now press the button marked ignition. Is there a faint crackling sound?'

'Yes, like the noise I make when I'm whipping the three eggs for your Friday omelette.'

'Perfect!'

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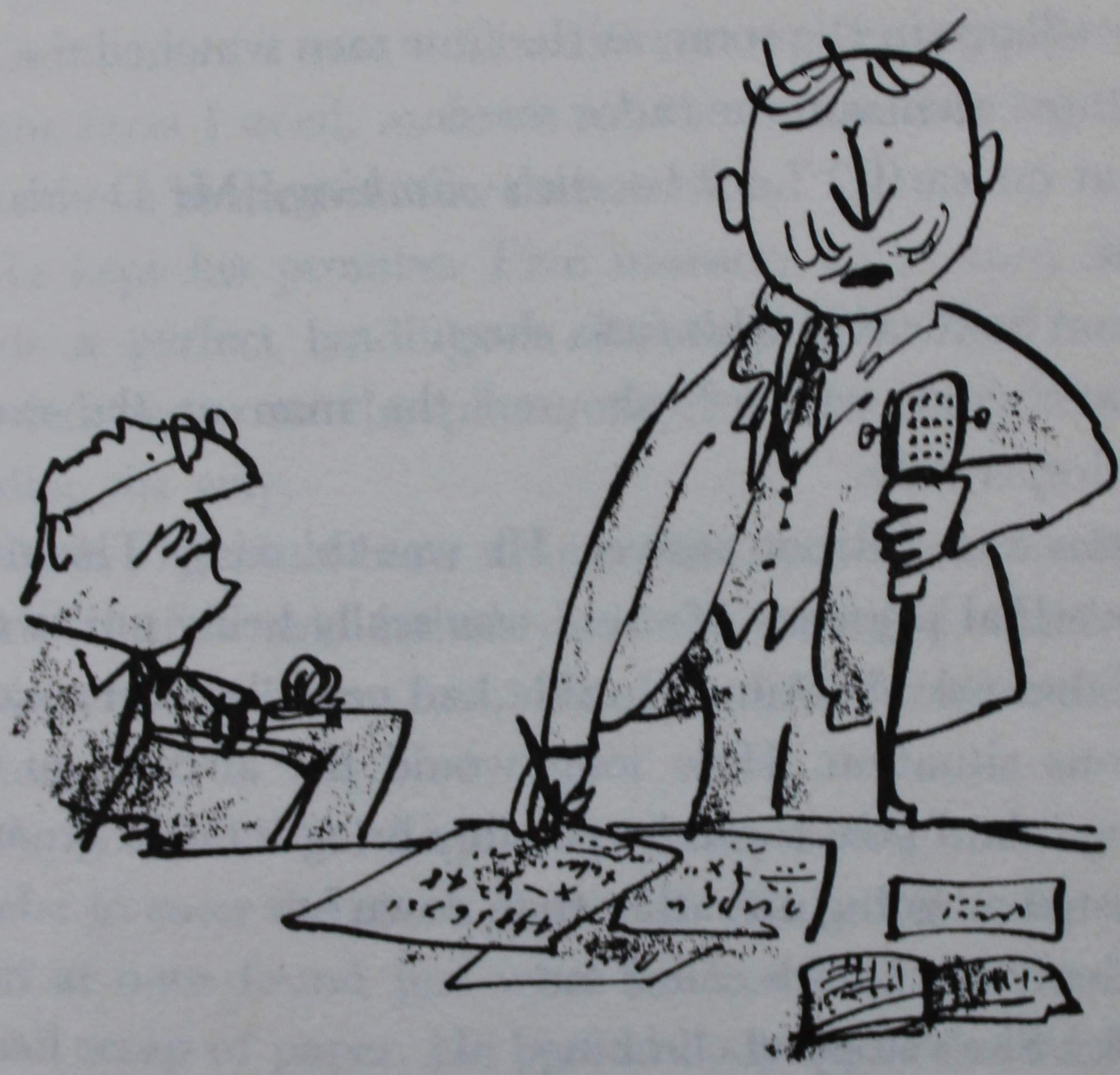

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'Perfect!'

craft has the same rights of supreme command as the captain of one of Her Majesty's ships at sea. That is to say, he, the pilot, and not she, the Aunt, is in all respects to be considered the absolute commander of this aircraft.'

'All right,' said Agaton Sax. 'I'll tell her. Aunt Matilda, are you there?'

'Of course I am. What do you want?'

'Well, you see, Aunt, we think it would be better if you unlocked the pantry door and let the pilot out. You see, according to the airport regulations, it's the pilot who . . .'

'That horrible bully? Not on your life.'

'But Aunt, you must understand, you've got to think of your own safety, you have no choice but to let him out and . . .'

'You're talking a lot of nonsense, Agaton! Will you never learn to reason logically? If I've locked him up, I've locked him up. And if I have, it's because I have my reasons. So why on earth should I let him out?'

'Because you can't navigate, you can't steer the plane, so you must . . .'

'I've already told you that the automatic pistol takes care of the navigation.'

'Yes, Aunt, I know, but you can't trust the automatic pilot for the landing.'

'Can't I? Why not?'

'Well, it's a bit difficult to explain, but you see the automatic pilot operates only according to certain instructions, and he hasn't been instructed to land, so the real pilot has to take care of the landing. That's why you must let him out.'

'Never!'

Agaton Sax looked at the others. Then he shrugged his

'Thank you, Aunt, you have done splendidly,' said Agaton Sax, full of pride and admiration. 'You have managed to catch, single handed, a member of the ruthless Max Brothers gang. Now it's our turn and we must try to bring you down safely. Listen very carefully. Has he put the two halves of Clever Dick together again?'

'Yes, don't worry, your precious confuser is all in one piece.'

'Good. Then we must do some tests and make sure he is functioning properly. Can you see a row of figures in the top left-hand corner of the instrument panel?'

'Yes.'

'Then first press the button marked 2, and then the one marked 3. Done that? Good. Now turn the key marked X, which is just below the numbered buttons. Have you got it? Good.'

'Is that all?'

'Not at all, this is just the beginning. Is there a slip of paper coming out of the machine? There is? Good. Then please read what is written on it.'

'It says 6.'

'Oh first class! Splendid! $2 \times 3 = 6$. My computer still works!'

The radio operator, the man at the radar screen, Mr Dodds and Mr Lispington exchanged anxious glances.

'We must tell her to free the pilot,' Mr Dodds said.

'So that he can get away with the plane, with my Aunt and with the computer?' asked Agaton Sax, his tone of voice indicating clearly what he thought of the idea.

'I must remind you, sir,' said Mr Dodds, 'that according to the regulations governing the navigation of aircraft and the control of a plane while in the air the pilot of the air-

and before I could say Jack Robinson, there I was, high up in the air, and my goodness what a noise that engine made, well, you can hear it now, can't you, Agaton? I asked him why he had been so inconsiderate as to start the engine without waiting to ask my permission but he only laughed, the bully, and said it would be better for me if I didn't shove my nose into other people's flying machines or something equally rude. You won't believe it, but I was so flabbergasted and so indignant that I couldn't say a word for over two hours. I settled down to do some knitting because that calms one down when one has to deal with crooks and criminals, but then he started tampering with some fishy-looking gadget which he called the automatic pistol—no, don't interrupt me—and said that if I valued my life, I'd better not touch it, and that he was going to the pantry to fix himself a ham or jellied veal sandwich or something, and so he went off to the pantry and I said to myself, "Now, Matilda, you can call for help, because that tiny little steel thing over there must be a microphone and there's no point in having a microphone unless you want to talk to someone on the ground." I was just going to shout "Help! Help!" into the microphone, when I said to myself, "How silly you are, Matilda, it would be much better to lock that scoundrel up first." So I went to the pantry, and there he was, making himself a sandwich, so quick as a flash I slammed the door and locked it. He started battering on the door with his fists and shouting and threatening me, but I took no notice and just told him to take it easy and explain to me about steering a flying machine, but he was carrying on like a madman and wouldn't listen to me. Of course the radio had been switched on all the time so you know the rest already, Agaton.'

'Yes, yes, he was O.K.,' Agaton Sax said. 'He was Scotland Yard's man.'

'O.K.,' said Aunt Matilda. 'But the other one who came was quite different. He was the one I had to lock up, because when you were talking to me over the telephone from London I saw him sneak into the garden—no, don't interrupt me, Agaton—he rang the bell and said that his mate —or whatever he called him—had collected the first half of the confuser and that he had come to take away the other half. I told him that was all right and he could help himself, though I didn't like the look of him. He took the other half of the confuser and bundled it off as fast as he could. But I was worried. The whole business seemed to me to be either a ridiculous mix-up or very fishy indeed. As you were away and Scotland Yard was involved and everything, I took my bicycle and followed him. When I got to Johansson's meadow he had already taken his half of the confuser on board the plane, so I went up and peeped in. There didn't seem to be anybody inside, so I went in, just to have a look round and to find out what was going on; then that lout came dashing out from the engine room or somewhere and told me to beat it, and I said, "Who do you think you are, talking to a lady like that?" But he didn't answer, not even in English, so I asked him who his mate was and where he was and why he—this one, the flowerbed trampler, I mean —didn't have a card from Scotland Yard. He grabbed hold of my arm and tried to push me out of the flying machine, but at that moment a car approached, I think it was the Mayor or possibly Inspector Antonsson, and he thought—no, don't interrupt me, Agaton, you never let me finish my sentences—he thought that they had come to arrest him, so he hauled me in, slammed the door and started the engine,

'That's it, the man who steers the flying machine—or rather steered it—until I fixed him. Now he's locked up, thank goodness. He's a bad lot, I can tell you. It was he who tried to call for help a few minutes ago. Did you hear him, the miserable coward? But I soon put a stop to that.'

'That lady's really dangerous—a grave security risk,' murmured Lispington, who had not forgotten that Aunt Matilda had once ambushed him with a yellow plastic pail filled with cold porridge.

'Aunt—this is . . . this is . . . most unexpected,' Agaton Sax exclaimed. 'Who is navigating the aircraft now?'

'What does navigating mean?'

'It means to guide, to drive in the right direction. Who is driving the aircraft?'

'Nobody, as far as I know!'

'Nobody?'

'Well, yes, there seems to be an automatic pistol in front.'

'An automatic pilot, you mean?'

'The plane is levelling out and holding a straight course,' the radar operator reported. 'If she continues on this course and at this speed, she will fly straight out over the Atlantic and should reach New York to-morrow morning at 1.17 G.M.T. Provided she doesn't run out of fuel, that is.'

'Listen, Aunt,' Agaton Sax said severely. 'Why have you locked up the pilot? And why are you in a plane belonging to Scotland Yard?'

'Because he's the wrong pilot,' Aunt Matilda answered impatiently. 'I can't stand pilots who stow away and then try to steer other pilots' flying machines. This man isn't the one who came to collect the first half of the confuser. He was all right, he showed me his card.'

7

Aunt Matilda touches down

'If this pilot is really your Aunt, then she is a completely different person from the one who harangued me a few minutes ago,' Mr Dodds remarked with some asperity.

'What's she saying?' said Lispington hoarsely. 'What's she up to? What's she doing in Scotland Yard's private plane, number XB 937?'

'She says she's fixed him.'

'Fixed him?'

'Fixed who?'

'Why?'

'How?'

Agaton Sax put his ear to the microphone, listening intently.

'Aunt!' he said firmly. 'Agaton here! What are you up to?'

'I'm flying!'

'But you can't fly, you know you can't!'

'I know.'

'Who is it you've fixed?'

'The steersman.'

'The steersman?'

only too well what had been said, because the voice was a familiar one and it had spoken in Swedish. His face was grey as he looked at Lispington.

'It's my Aunt,' he said quietly.

All four stared at the screen, their eyes riveted on the small dot which was performing such strange manœuvres.

Suddenly the man on wireless duty called out:

'Here he is again!'

They dashed across the room and listened breathlessly. There was a faint crackling coming from the loud-speaker, but no human voice could be distinguished.

'Hallo, Hallo!' the operator shouted into the microphone. 'Calling XB 937! Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Over.'

Now they could just make out a voice, so feeble that it was scarcely audible. Everyone listened, holding his breath and straining to catch any words.

'Calling XB 937! Answer me, please.'

But the voice had faded. They pressed their ears against the loud-speaker, hoping to catch a sign of life from the plane. It was a tense moment. In imagination each one of them was flying in that lonely plane, whose pilot's strange words and extraordinary aerobatics had caused such confusion at Air Traffic Control.

Now, at last! Through the crackling and screeching of the atmospherics, the longed-for human voice could be heard. Confidently they waited for it to prove that the Scotland Yard pilot was still at the controls, still master of the aircraft, still steering her proudly over the clouds. A piercing voice sang out in triumph:

'That's fixed you, my friend.'

Lispington and the other Englishmen looked at each other in silent bewilderment. They had not understood a word the pilot had said. Agaton Sax attempted a stiff little smile, which did not, however, conceal his deep concern. He knew

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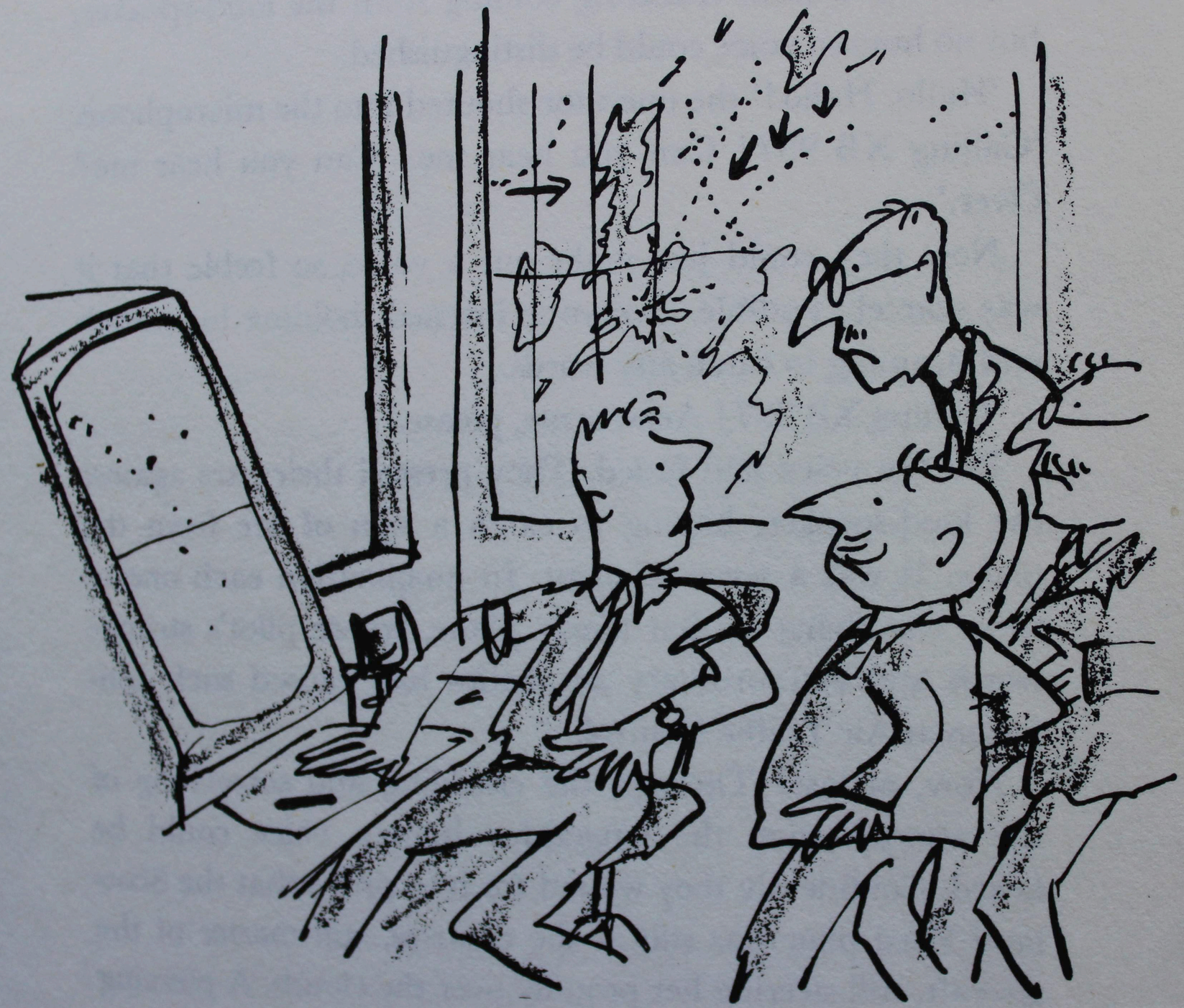
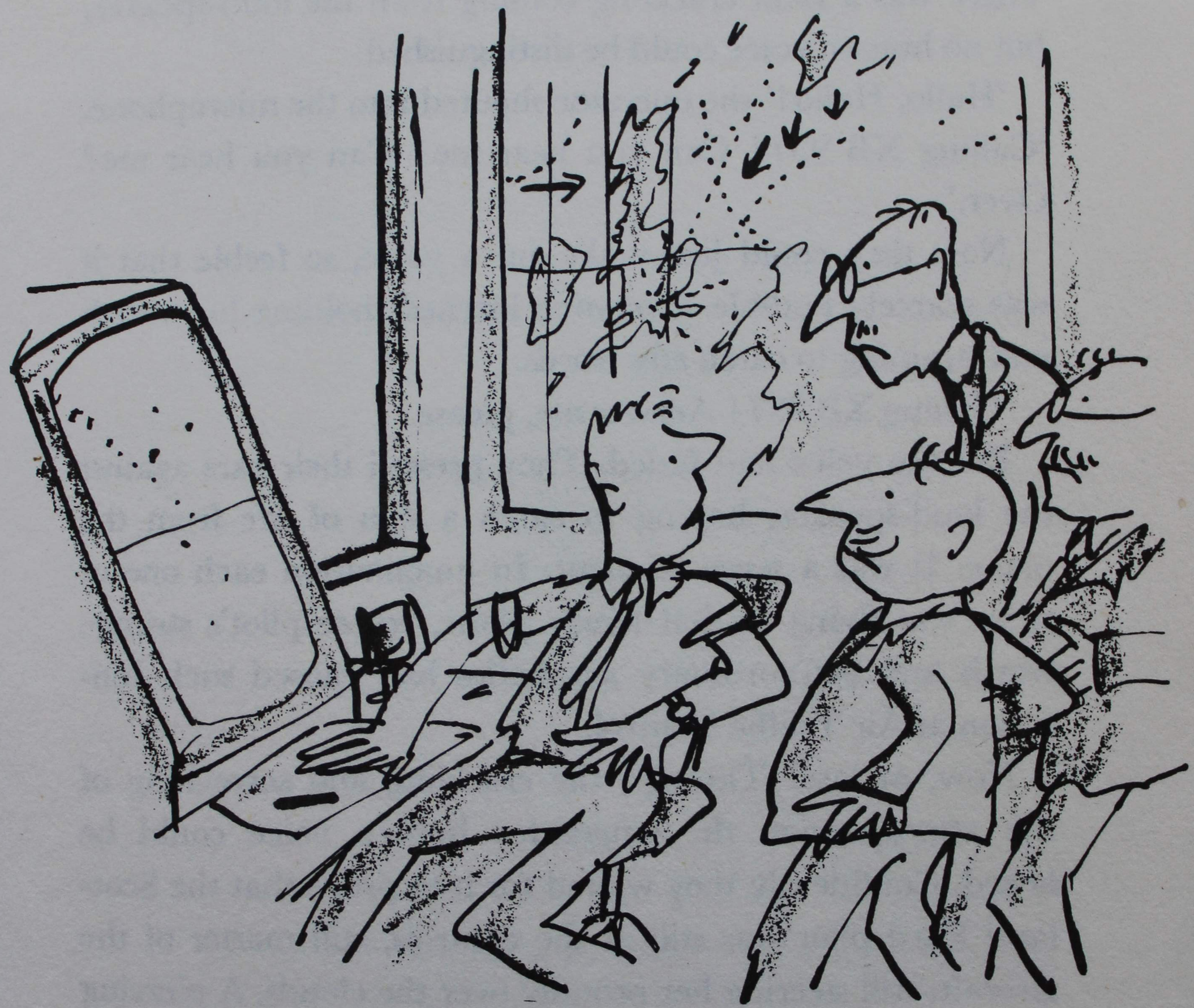


few hundred yards, then suddenly dives again. The

'This is remarkable, gentlemen. I've never seen anything like it before. He's bouncing up and down.'

'Upside down?'

'Well, for all I know he may be upside down, too, but what I actually meant was that he's climbing steeply for a



few hundred yards, then suddenly diving again. There, watch him now! He's climbing again, now a right-hand turn, now a left-hand. Now he's turning right round! He's heading East again! Heavens above, Mr Dodds, what sort of a plane is this?'

Agaton Sax's expression that he was listening to this exchange with the greatest interest.

Mr Dodds cleared his throat. He seemed embarrassed.

'Oh yes, he contacted us all right, Mr Lispington. But he was . . . how shall I put it . . . he was . . . well . . . furious. Yes, that's the word, sir. Furious. He was furious.'

'Furious?' Lispington stared at him.

'Yes, sir. He . . . yelled and roared at us, sir.'

'I see. And what did he yell and roar?'

'Well, he said: "What the devil do you think you are doing, you vicious, scheming traitor? Have you gone mad? I'll see you pay for this, you monster!"'

'Then what happened?'

'There was silence for about two minutes. Then he started up again, and this time it was much worse. He roared with rage. "You'll have us in the drink, clown, ass, nincompoop! Can't you see we're losing height, you incompetent nut? I'll report you to the Ministry of Aviation. I'll have you clapped in irons, locked in the Tower . . . Help!"'

'He did actually call for help?'

'Yes, he did. Then there was dead silence. We've heard nothing from him since, sir.'

Agaton Sax went up to the map on the wall. After studying it a few seconds, he turned to Mr Dodds:

'Where do you think the plane is now?'

Mr Dodds pointed. At the same moment an official at the other end of the room shouted:

'Here he comes!'

The other man was watching the radar screen, across which aircraft within a certain area moved like small dots. The three men hurried over to the screen. The radar man indicated a black dot.

never are. Not in this country, anyway. How can they be, it's not their job to be funny.'

'I suppose you are right, Lispington,' murmured Agaton Sax abstractedly. Then he smiled. 'Never mind, relief is at hand. At this very moment Clever Dick is being flown to England. The plane should be entering British air space now. Let's get over to London airport as soon as we can.'

Half an hour later they arrived at the airport, and went straight to the Air Traffic Control room, where all arrivals and departures are plotted. The Head of Arrivals, Mr Dodds, greeted them with a friendly handshake and led them over to a large map hanging on the wall.

'I understand that you want information about Scotland Yard's plane, XB 937,' he said, his voice serious.

'That's right,' said Lispington. 'The aircraft is coming, as you know, from Bykoping in Sweden, where it picked up a . . . a . . . how shall I say . . . a certain Mr Clever Dick.'

'Quite,' said Mr Dodds, nodding. 'As a matter of fact, Mr Lispington, I must admit that I am a bit worried.'

'Worried?' Lispington's hand fluttered nervously to his mouth. 'What's happened?'

Mr Dodds picked up a long, thin marker stick standing in a corner of the room. 'I wish I knew,' he said.

He lifted the marker and pointed to a small dot on the map a few miles off the South coast of England.

'At this point here, gentlemen, according to his instructions, your pilot should have made his first radio contact with us.'

A faint blush spread across Mr Dodds' face as he lowered the marker to the ground.

'Well, Mr Dodds, did he contact you or didn't he?' Lispington asked with increasing anxiety. It was obvious from

'Well, I never . . . Now he's peering through the office window! Peeping Tom! I'll teach him!'

'No, for Heaven's sake, Aunt, don't! He may be really dangerous! Don't hang up, I must . . .'

'Stop talking nonsense, Agaton, and don't be late for dinner!'

'Aunt! What are you going to do?'

But Aunt Matilda had already rung off. Agaton Sax hung up the receiver, deeply worried. The unexpected had occurred. Something was going on in Bykoping that should not be going on. He booked another call to Aunt Matilda; there was no reply. He tried again and again, but four hours later he had still not succeeded in contacting his Aunt.

What had happened in Bykoping? His mind full of sinister forebodings he took himself off to Scotland Yard. Lispington, looking pale, was waiting for him. He seemed strained, and his manner was off-hand. The two of them sat down and looked at each other in silence. After a minute or two, Agaton Sax spoke:

'Well, is everything under control?'

Lispington shrugged his shoulders.

'I've just had a call from the Government,' he said. 'They had seen the announcement you inserted in the papers saying that I was touring Germany on holiday. They enquired, most politely, if I intended to prolong my stay for another two or three weeks. Just interested in my welfare, of course. Nice people, aren't they?'

'That's the way of Governments,' Agaton Sax said sympathetically. 'I shouldn't worry if I were you.'

'I prefer Governments when they are angry. I can't stand them when they are trying to be funny,' Lispington added bitterly. 'Because they aren't funny at all. Governments

'But don't you see, Aunt, I must assist him. This is one of the most mysterious cases ever . . .'

'Don't get lost in that maze! I warn you, Agaton, you are far too easily persuaded.'

'I'm not getting lost in a maze, Aunt, it's a case, a criminal case I'm investigating . . .'

'You heard what I said, Agaton. I must go, I've got to wash the washing machine. Who's that?'

'Who's who?'

'The man! He's coming back already!'

'What man?'

'The man from Scotland Yard.'

'But didn't you say he would come back for the other half of Clever Dick?'

'Dick what?'

'The computer.'

'I'd better ask him. Good Heavens! What's he doing now?'

'What do you mean—what's he doing now?'

'Wrecker! Vandal! Look at him! Stop him!'

'I can't, Aunt. What is it? Please tell me what he's doing.'

'He's trampling on the flower-beds! Stupid lout! But it isn't him!'

'Not him?'

'No!'

'Who is it then?'

'How should I know? Another wretched foreigner, I suppose. Anyway, whoever he is I'm going to throw him out!'

'Wait a minute, Aunt. He may be dangerous!'

'He certainly looks it, that's why I'm going to throw him out. Just look at him now!'

'Stop, Aunt! Don't hang up!'

'Of course it's me! I couldn't very well be talking to you if it weren't!'

'Why didn't you phone me before?'

'Before?'

'Yes—to tell me that someone was coming for that threshing machine you keep in the wardrobe.'

'That's why I'm calling you now, Aunt.'

'Why?'

'To tell you about the computer in the wardrobe. The man has already been to collect it, has he?'

'What man?'

'The man from Scotland Yard. He should have come by plane.'

'That's right. A most suspicious-looking character. A foreigner.'

'I see. And he said he'd come to collect the computer?'

'Exactly. If that threshing-machine thing is a confuser, then he collected half of it. He broke it in two and took off one half. He said he would be back for the other bit in half an hour.'

'That's fine, Aunt. Did he by any chance show you a card?'

'Yes. But I told him I never buy cards or anything else from door-to-door salesmen.'

'But he wasn't trying to sell it to you, Aunt. There was a number on the card, wasn't there?'

'Yes. BC 49768—or *vice versa*, I don't quite remember.'

'It doesn't matter. It was his identity card, and he just wanted you to be satisfied that everything was in order. I must go now, I have an appointment with Mr Lispington.'

'That man! Is he still prowling around? You'd better be careful, Agaton!'

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waiting for a telephone call he had booked half an hour earlier. The phone rang.

'Your call to Mr—or was it Miss—Bicycle in Sweden has come through,' the operator said.

'Not Bicycle—you mean Bykoping, and besides . . . Oh, never mind, I'll take it. Hallo!'

'Hallo!'

'Is that you, Aunt?'

'Of course it's me! How can you ask such a silly question, Agaton? Is that you, Agaton?'

no shaving equipment—and we shall have the evidence after all. Do you follow my plan?'

'Yes.'

'What do you think of it?'

'I think your plan is a clever and most ingenious one. But unfortunately it is quite incompatible with German law, which explicitly states that it is forbidden, for any reason whatsoever, to alter the appearance of any person or persons under arrest or in custody. Furthermore, I'm afraid you're too late.'

'Too late? What do you mean?'

'Look out of the window, Mr Lispington!'

While the two friends had been talking, a helicopter had been hovering over the train. A man—materialising from nowhere apparently—suddenly jumped from the roof of the train on to a rope ladder hanging down from the helicopter. With a vicious, triumphant smile the man waved his hand at Agaton Sax and Lispington, then disappeared into the helicopter, which made off at a speed of at least 150 miles an hour.

'Super Max!'

'Yes, and with his passport,' Agaton Sax murmured thoughtfully. 'But don't worry,' he continued more cheerfully. 'In three hours we'll be in London. In four days we'll have the whole gang behind bars. My plan is absolutely watertight. I'm inclined to think it's one of the most remarkable plans in the history of Crime. But first I must ring up my Aunt.'

The following morning Agaton Sax was sitting in his hotel room in London. He had had four hours of refreshing sleep, and his cheeks were glowing with energy. He was

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Lispington, startled.

'Exactly what I say. We could probably stop him from disappearing, but, as you know, we couldn't arrest him.'

'You mean Super Max.'

'Yes.'

'It's all so outrageous,' Lispington muttered helplessly. 'Just imagine—there he is, only twenty yards away—and we can't book him!'

He heaved a deep sigh. Suddenly, he jerked upright. A gleam of hope and comfort shone in his eyes. He almost spoke out loud, so great was his joy at the idea which had suddenly struck him, but just in time his training as a policeman got the better of his impulsive nature; he took his fountain-pen microphone out of his pocket and whispered excitedly into it:

'I've got it!'

'What have you got?' Agaton Sax asked his pipe.

'I've thought of the perfect way to get him. In a few minutes the train will stop at the German passport control point. The passport officer will take Super Max's passport, stamp it, and then give it to me to return to him. I will tear it to pieces. Are you with me, Mr Sax?'

'Yes.'

'Good. Since he will have no passport it will be quite easy for the German police to delay, even detain, Super Max indefinitely. You know how infuriating officialdom is. He can be required to fill in innumerable forms in triplicate, wait for them to be date stamped, wait for top-level decisions since his application will be so complicated. Formalities and red tape will easily delay him for two weeks—by which time his hair will have grown—he will be allowed

window. The night was dark, and there was a chilly wind. From time to time a faint light flickered by in the darkness. Agaton Sax leaned out of the window and looked at his watch.

'Just right,' he said.

'What's just right?'

'The time. In two minutes we'll be passing the little station at Knochenbrochen.'

The train's speed had dropped to some 30 miles an hour. Now the station house came in sight. Deftly Agaton Sax tossed the small parcel out of the window so that it fell right at the feet of the station master, who was standing on the platform saluting the train and Agaton Sax with his green flag.

'Why on earth do you throw your money away on German railway stations?' Lispington enquired with some irritation.

'That was just a message for my very old friend the station master of Knochenbrochen. He is an excellent amateur criminoligist and detective, and I asked him to put through an immediate telephone call to Hamburg Airport and tell them to have a plane ready for us on our arrival there in an hour and a half. Scotland Yard will have to pay the bill,' he added with a smile.

'But have you forgotten that three people have disappeared from this train in the most unaccountable way?' Lispington asked anxiously.

'No, I'm fully aware of it,' Agaton Sax answered. 'But even if you knew how they disappeared—what could you do about it? Incidentally,' he added in a whisper, 'I can tell you that the fourth man will also disappear in a few minutes.'

'You are under arrest!' Lispington exploded. 'And you will not be allowed to have razors or electric hair-cutters in your cell. After a week or so your hair will have grown sufficiently to supply me with all the evidence I need.'

'My hair—my foot! You cannot arrest me!' Super Max asserted confidently.

'Can't I? Why?'

'Before you arrest me, you must have some evidence against me—and that evidence you can get only if you keep me in prison for two weeks. But you cannot keep me in prison, because you cannot arrest me. You see? Like your chicken and your egg, which must come first? It is impossible! It cannot be done! Never! The law is on my side!'

Lispington stared, first at Super Max, then at Agaton Sax. The ace detective nodded his head solemnly.

'I'm afraid he's right, Mr Lispington.'

6

Danger in the air

Inwardly Lispington gnashed his teeth, outwardly he made no sign. He realised that Super Max and Agaton Sax were right and that he was powerless to act. The editor-in-chief of the *Bykoping Post* bowed stiffly to the master criminal, and said:

'Remember, Mr Super Max, I recognised you first. You can't escape me. It's quite impossible. You must realise that. Within four days Lispington and I will have you under lock and key.'

Silence. Another almost invisible twitch—this time just under the right eyebrow—was the only answer he got from Super Max.

Agaton Sax took Lispington by the arm, and they went down the corridor towards their compartment. Before entering it, they stood for a while outside. Agaton Sax produced a small piece of paper from one of his secret pockets, jotted down a few words, then dug in another pocket and brought out five Swedish silver crowns. He wrapped the paper carefully round the crowns and secured the small parcel with a piece of string. Lispington watched these strange goings-on with an air of amused disbelief. Agaton Sax opened the

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'I'm afraid he's right, Mr Lispington.'

Lispington, who stood petrified by this new turn of events.

Agaton Sax stood behind him in the corridor. He had lit his pipe. He stood there looking at Super Max with an inscrutable expression on his face. Still smiling, Super Max said:

'You are Agaton Sax, eh?'

'Of course.'

'I have known all along who you are, the two of you.'

'Not all along,' said Agaton Sax. 'You didn't know it till you saw us in the train.'

'In the train, eh?'

'Yes.'

Agaton Sax's face had assumed the menacing expression which was well known and justly feared by all members of the International Underworld; an expression which, automatically, sent shivers of fear down the spines of even the most cold-blooded perpetrators of crime. Super Max was no exception to this rule. He stood his ground, but his fear was betrayed by a small tic just under his left eyebrow.

'Here in this train? What do you mean?' he asked, hiding his terror beneath a mask of arrogance.

'You did not recognise us in Bykoping,' Agaton Sax said with great emphasis. 'That was your fatal mistake. I saw through you right from the start but you never deceived me. You must realise what that means—defeat!'

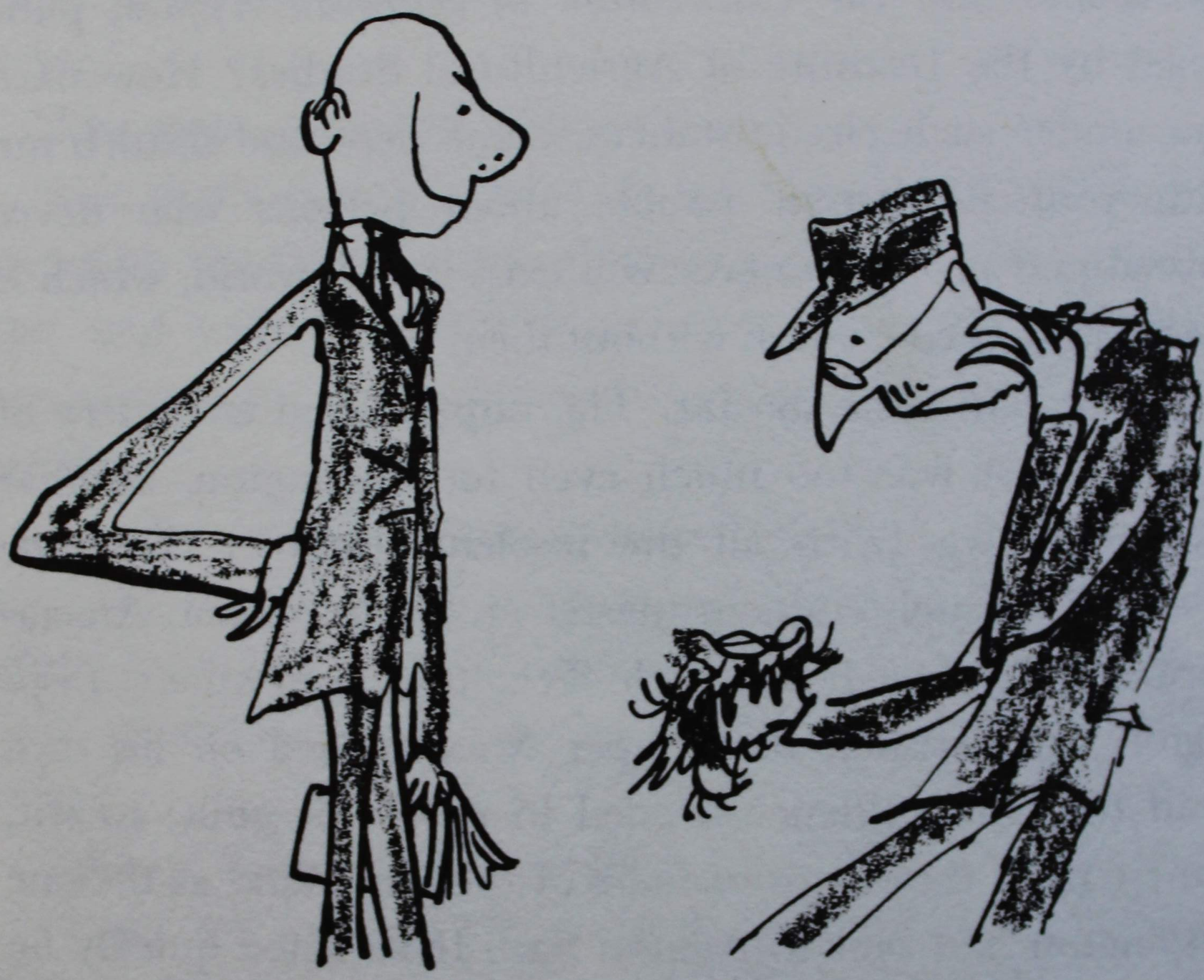
'But you have no proof—no evidence—nothing to show —you can never touch one single hair on my head!'

'Can't I?' exclaimed Lispington loudly.

'No!' said Super Max with a vicious smile. 'You see, I shave my head every week. That's why I am as bald as I am bold—ha ha ha!'

Dancing for joy Lispington brandished the lock—or what he thought was the lock—in the air. A second later he realised his terrible mistake. It was not just a lock of hair, it was all the hair that Super Max possessed. In other words —it was a wig.

Super Max stood in front of him—absolutely bald. He was so bald that it was impossible to believe he had ever



had one single hair on his head. And the worst of it was that he seemed so happy to be bald. His cruel mouth opened in a smile that was at one and the same time kindly, supercilious, cultured and triumphant. He gestured expansively in Lispington's direction, saying :

'You are very much surprised, eh? Taken aback, eh? You thought I would be in the jam or gone to pot, eh? You forgot that I am very sharp and smart, eh?'

He stretched out his hand and took back the wig from

Super Max rose to his feet. Flushed with indignation, he seemed about to have a fit.

'And I forbid you, whoever you are, to come here and disturb for me my utterly serene and sublime loneliness! How dare you break the chain of my philosophical meditations? How can it escape your observation, you insolent lout, that I am immersed in the study of Volume I of *Researches into the Cultivation of Norman Apples*, published by the Institute of Agricultural Studies? How dare you, under such circumstances, come here and disturb me with your incoherent babble about persons who never existed and probably never will exist in this world, which is mad and wicked enough without them!'

But he had gone too far. The unparalleled effrontery of this outburst was too much even for Lispington, familiar though he was with all the insolent tricks of the trade favoured by such eminent master crooks as Mosca, Anaxagoras Frank, The Boss, Uncle Teetotum, and others. Lispington was satisfied that Super Max carried on his own head the only evidence needed to prove his guilt; to wit, some tens of thousands of hairs of the same kind as the one Lispington had sent to Agaton Sax. If he acted quickly he could have, literally within his grasp, one of the most remarkable exhibits in the history of Crime. Casting care to the winds the Inspector lunged at Super Max in a last desperate bid to snatch a hair from his head.

Super Max appeared to be completely taken by surprise, and Lispington's heart gave an extra beat of sheer triumph as, with outstretched hand, he tugged at the hair of this most dangerous of all criminals. With a cry of delight the detective wrenched free a whole fistful of hair—overwhelming evidence that would convince any jury in the world.

had gone also, just as mysteriously and enigmatically as the other two.

Super Max was quietly reading a large German book. He looked up, frowning, and said :

'Who are you, and what do you want ?'

'You know very well who I am, and you also know I am looking for the corpulent man who was in this compartment a minute ago. I need to have another look at his ticket.'

'The corp—corpilent man, you say ?'

'Yes, that's exactly what I do say. He was here with you and with the German guard who disappeared five minutes ago, and with the other corpulent man who disappeared two minutes later. What have you done with them ? Where are they ?'

'You are trying to pull up one of my legs, sir, eh ? Who are you ? Why do you force your way into my compartment, where I, an inoffensive German professor, have been sitting quite peacefully and alone in the whole of the evening ? Why ?'

'Alone ! There were four of you a few minutes ago !'

'Then, sir, you are, I beg your pardon for saying it, the first man in the world who sees two times double, or fourfold. Is that so ? Or are you dreaming, sir ? I have never set eyes on you before in my life, and will you please be so kind as to leave me alone and stop pretending that I am four gentlemen instead of one.'

'You are a miserable crook !' Lispington exclaimed, white with anger. 'Where have you hidden your accomplices ? In the name of the law I forbid you to do away with passengers travelling in this compartment or in any other compartment of the train !'

You see? But by all means, you can pip—or is it peep you say in your language?—yes, you can peep under that hat on the rack, perhaps he is hiding there? Who knows?'

Lispington staggered into the corridor. He was in a cold sweat as he lurched towards Agaton Sax who had been standing waiting in the corridor all the time.

'Listen, Agaton Sax,' Lispington whispered into his microphone. 'This is unbelievable! Two men have disappeared in the course of four minutes. Now Mox, too, has gone. Disappeared—vanished into thin air. Do you understand?'

'I understand perfectly. Tell me what happened.'

An angry hissing could be heard as Lispington told him all that had happened.

'The window,' said Agaton Sax. 'They were thrown out of the window.'

'But that's absolutely impossible!' Lispington protested. 'The guard, possibly, but not fat Mox. Look at the windows, Mr Sax! See how narrow they are! Mox is—or should I say was—at least twice as broad as the window.'

'True, but then remember how they disappeared from the barrels in Bykoping,' Agaton Sax reminded him. 'Still, we mustn't waste time speculating. What are you going to do now?'

'Go back again. I didn't get a single hair. This time I really must succeed.'

He swallowed the last drop of water from the glass Agaton Sax had given him, then yet again walked courageously back to the thieves' compartment and jerked the door open. He stared blankly, awe-stricken, into the compartment, as if it had been full of ghosts. But there were no ghosts—*there was just one man*. Super Max. He knew Mox had gone, he knew the false guard had gone; but now Mix

thieves' compartment. This time it was Mix who opened the door.

'I'm sorry,' Lispington said, 'but I have to see your tickets again. There seems to have been something wrong with the date stamp when they were issued. Yours first, sir, if you don't mind, and then the others. Thank you. May I see . . .'

He stopped abruptly, swallowed hard two or three times; then, with an effort, managed to clear his throat and ask weakly, 'And the third gentleman who was in the compartment . . . ?' He stared at the empty corner seat. 'Is he perhaps hidden behind that large overcoat?'

Super Max looked at him, raising his eyebrows in a gesture of surprise and irritation :

'Here? You meant his hanging brown overcoat here, Mr Guard?' With a flourish he whipped the overcoat off its peg.

'Can you see him, Mr Guard, eh? He must be very small then, this third man you are talking about, eh?'

'There were three of you in this compartment only a few minutes ago,' Lispington insisted furiously. 'You yourself, that gentleman,' Lispington pointed at Mix, 'and a third gentleman. Where has the third passenger gone?'

'The third passenger? But I do not understand—not one single word of what you are saying do I understand! What are you talking about, Mr Guard?'

'I'm talking about the third man in this compartment, and well you know it!'

'You must be dreaming! You must be a sleep-walker and a sleep-talker without knowing it, Mr Guard! There has never been a German guard here, except you, and there has never been any third man either here in this compartment. That gentleman and myself are the only persons who have been sitting here quite calmly and innocently all along.

With an effort he pulled himself together. 'And the other German guard,' he said, 'has he already left?'

Super Max glared at him. There was the shadow of a smile on his cruel lips as he answered:

'The other guard?'

'Yes, the one who came in here two minutes ago, and has not yet come out.'

'I deeply regret, Mr Guard, but I have to say there has been no other guard coming in here. Oh no, not at all.'

'But I myself saw him enter your compartment,' Lispington insisted angrily.

'Oh no, not here into this compartment. No, Mr Guard! By no means has he been here.'

'But where else can he be? The door next to this one is locked, and he is not in either of the other two compartments.' Lispington was getting angry.

'I never pry into other people's compartments, Mr Guard,' replied Super Max smoothly. 'Oh no, it is not my custom. In this compartment here, the only German guard we have seen up to now is you, Mr Guard, and we have seen quite enough of you, yes?'

Agaton Sax was reading when Lispington returned. He poured out a glass of water for his friend. Then they went into the corridor to keep a watchful eye on the brothers' compartment.

'It's absolutely incredible,' Lispington whispered into a second orange. 'How could I make such a mistake?'

'It could happen to anyone,' Agaton Sax consoled him through his cigar, 'but you must have another shot at getting hold of a hair, so that I can analyse it.'

'I must indeed, otherwise I can't take legal action.'

Doggedly Lispington strode off down the corridor to the

ington was quite right. He had known it all along, but he had wanted to put Lispington's powers of deduction to the test.

'So. What do you intend to do now, Mr Lispington?'

'Go along to their carriage at once and take them by surprise.'

'You can try,' said Agaton Sax, 'but I think I should warn you,' he added gravely, 'that *you* are the one who is going to be surprised.'

'Me? Surprised?'

'Yes. Very much so.'

Lispington shrugged his shoulders.

'Now don't you worry yourself, Mr Sax,' he said. 'I'll soon be back with the first of the three hairs.' He smiled to himself, a self-satisfied little smirk, then brushing a speck of dust from his neat uniform, and with his head held high he strode away down the corridor.

The Max brothers had closed the door and drawn the curtain. Lispington knocked. No answer. He knocked once more. Suddenly the door was flung open and Lispington found himself staring into Mox's face. Mox stared back—and very insolently, too.

'I am the German guard,' said Lispington. 'May I see your tickets, please?'

Mox stepped aside, and Lispington marched into the compartment. All at once his step faltered, he even seemed to shrink. This is impossible, he thought. Mechanically he checked the tickets which Super Max, Mox and Mix showed him. He simply couldn't understand how there could be no one else in the compartment, no false guard (except, of course, he himself).

'You think you know all the answers, don't you?' Lispington muttered between his teeth.

The other man shrugged his shoulders. 'I am not denying that you have attended all the courses at the Guards' Training School, and even received your Guard's Certificate. All I say is that someone at headquarters has made a mistake. It won't be the first time the Central Office of Staff Planning of the State Railways has blundered. They must have assigned two guards to the same train, that's all. And you, sir,' he continued, turning to Agaton Sax, 'are you a German guard, too?'

Agaton Sax showed him his ticket, a faint smile on his lips. The man clipped it, saluted, and left them. Lispington peered cautiously round the door. Suddenly, Agaton Sax saw his friend's lean body stiffen ominously. Lispington swung round, whispering anxiously: 'He's gone into the thieves' compartment!'

'Who?'

'The guard.'

'Why shouldn't he?'

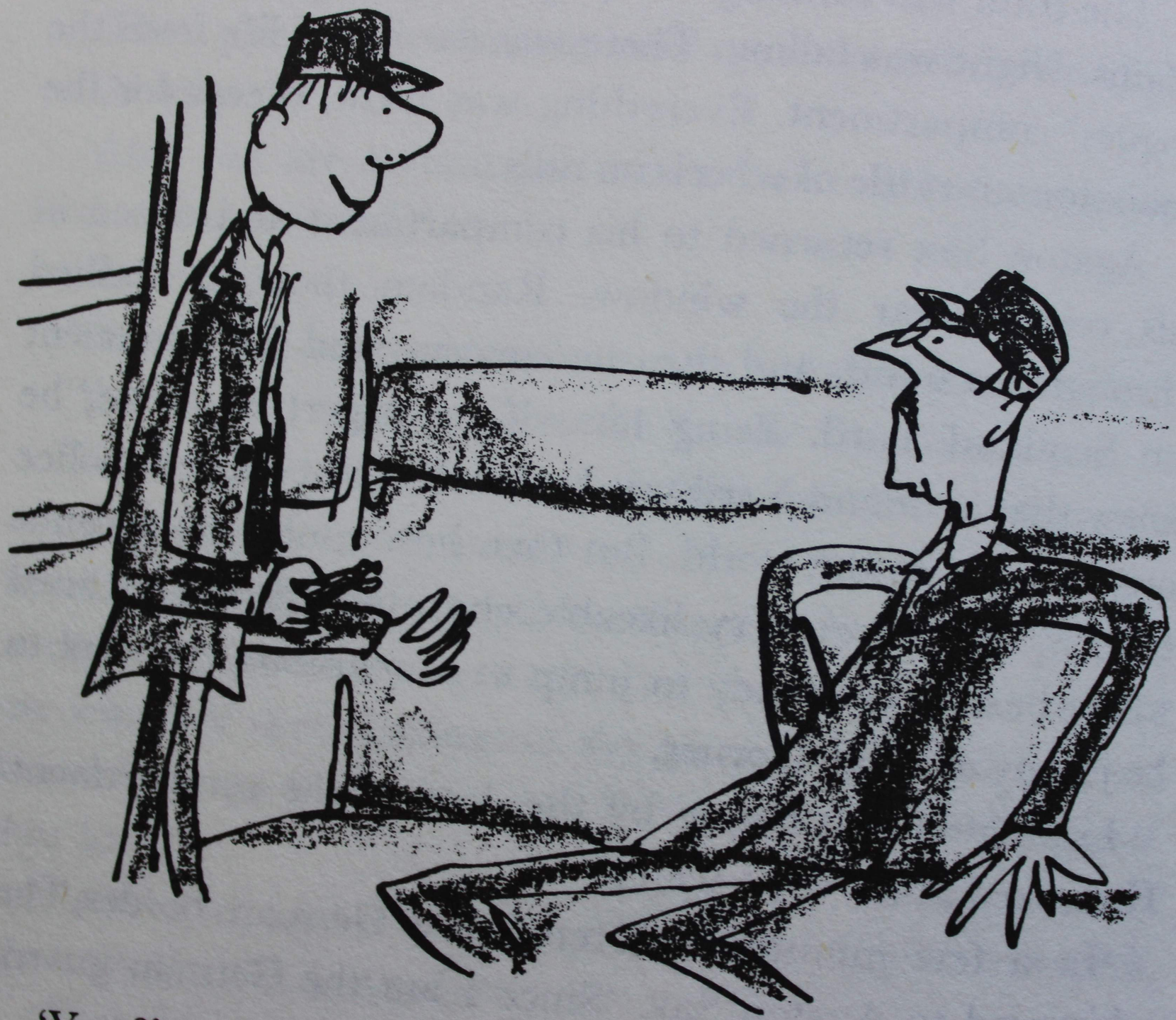
'Because . . .' Lispington hesitated. 'I know! Because he *came* from that direction! He must have been there and asked for their tickets before he came to us. So why should he return to their compartment?'

'Exactly. What conclusion can you draw from his behaviour?'

'He is not a genuine guard at all.'

Lispington grabbed his friend's arm, eager to convince him of the importance of this discovery. 'Don't you understand, Mr Sax? He is as false as I am. He must be one of the gang, it all fits.'

Agaton Sax got up slowly. He knew, of course, that Lisp-



'You?'

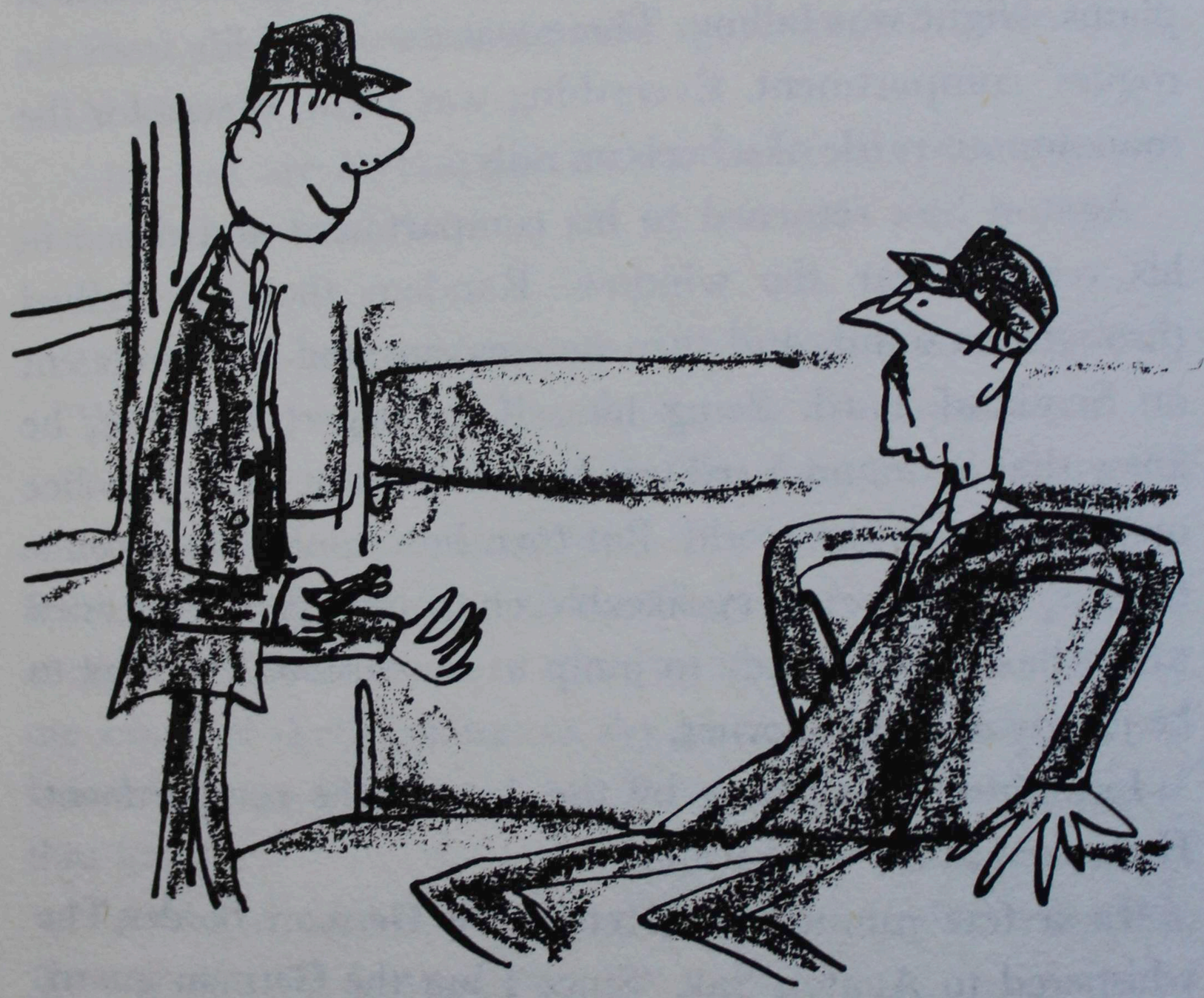
'Me! May I see your ticket, please?'

Lispington stared at him.

'*You* are the German guard!' he exclaimed.

'That's what I said.' The man answered boldly enough, yet he seemed uncomfortable and there was a glimmer of fear in his eyes, or so Agaton Sax thought.

'*I* am the German guard,' Lispington answered, equally uncomfortable.



'You?'

'Me! May I see your ticket, please?'

'I have no ticket. May I see yours, please?'

'Since I am the guard, I don't need a ticket,' Lispington answered haughtily. 'If you were a guard you would know that.'

'Then why do you expect *me* to have a ticket, since I am in fact the guard on this train?' the other man retorted.

about this plan. At this stage of the game Lispington's self-confidence was very dangerous. There was no way of telling in advance what risk the Inspector would take next. On the other hand, Lispington, a high-ranking police officer, was the only one authorised to take legal action; arrest, charge, take into custody, and keep under lock and key, so Agaton Sax had no choice but to let him have his head.

The train was running at top speed across the flat Danish plains. Night was falling. There was no sign of life from the rogues' compartment. Everything was silent, except for the monotonous rattle of wheels on rails.

Agaton Sax returned to his compartment and dozed in his corner near the window. Random thoughts flashed through his mind, and then he concentrated for a moment on Scotland Yard. Being himself an expert in crime, he knew that Scotland Yard was by far the most efficient police organisation in the world. But then how could you account for Lispington? A very likeable chap indeed, but inclined to act hastily, too ready to jump to conclusions, even apt to be jumpy in a tight corner.

Lispington was sitting by the door of the compartment. He looked at his wrist-watch.

'In a few minutes we'll cross the German border,' he whispered to Agaton Sax. 'Since I am the German guard, I must go on duty.'

'All right. I'll wait for you here.'

Lispington rose to his feet. At the same moment, the door was pushed open, and a tall, lean man in a green uniform entered the compartment.

'Good evening to you, gentlemen,' he said in English, but with a very strong foreign accent. 'May I see your tickets, please? I am the German guard.'

radio sets. Tiny microphones were hidden in the palms of their hands, and they listened to each other through microscopic loud-speakers hidden in the collars of their shirts. Their wave-length was 27 MC.

'Can you hear me, Mr Sax,' Lispington whispered to the orange he was about to suck.

'Loud and clear,' Agaton Sax informed the cigar he was in the act of lighting.

'Then you know what our next move must be, Mr Sax?'

'Absolutely.'

'And you are certain you can tell if two hairs emanate from the same head?'

'Positive!'

'Good. You have your microscopic microscope with you?'

'Yes. Where I always keep it—in my Saturday pipe.'

'Good again. Now, let me run through the main points of my plan. As soon as an opportunity occurs, I'll seize three hairs from the brothers—if necessary by force—one from each head. Once you have analysed the three hairs and told me which of them belongs to the same head as the hair we found between the bank-notes, I can arrest the ex-bearer of that hair!'

'I see,' said Agaton Sax. 'And how do you plan to snatch the hairs from their heads?'

'That, Mr Sax, is my headache, if you'll pardon the pun! You can trust me—in all weathers!'

'And when will you take action?'

'Not until we have crossed the German border,' Lispington whispered. 'They're so fussy about arrests and things in Denmark—too many application forms to fill in. Doesn't suit me a bit.'

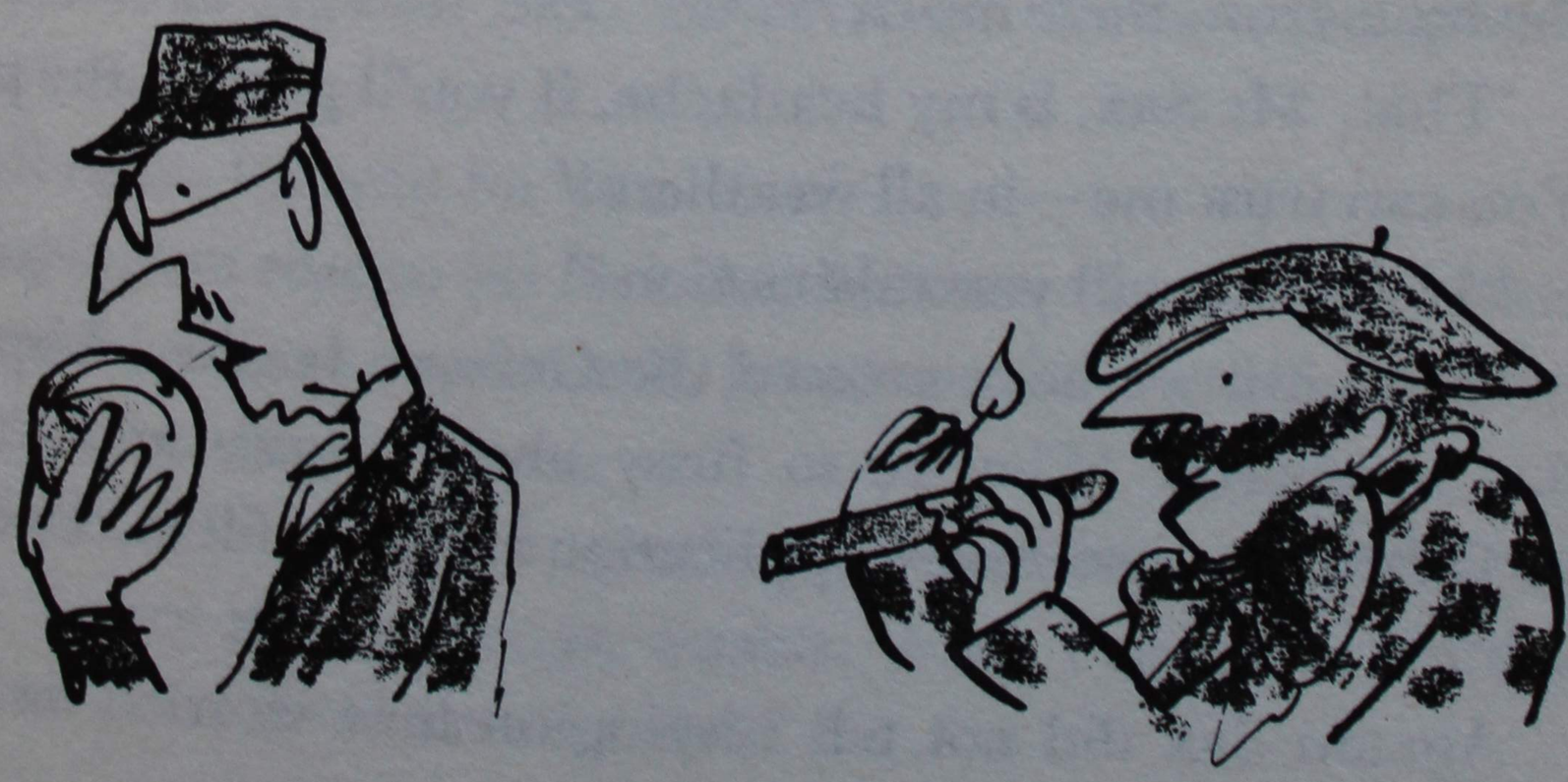
Agaton Sax did not tell Lispington how worried he was

standing at two of the corridor windows. They seemed to be gazing into space, lost in melancholy thoughts, but a sharp-eyed radio technician would have noticed that they were talking to each other. Agaton Sax had taken the precaution of seeing that they were supplied with superb micro-

their tickets to the collector. In spite of the fact that they were carrying large, obviously heavy leather suitcases, Lispington had to admit to himself that Mox and Mix walked with such grace, taking long easy strides, that he was inevitably reminded of the progress of a ballet dancer across a stage. This was even more remarkable since their combined weights must have totalled at least thirty-eight stone.

Super Max had the tickets in his right hand and flourished them energetically as they passed the guard's van. He forced his way resolutely straight through the crowd on the platform, his brothers following in his wake. Once in the train, they took possession of a whole compartment, which did not seem unreasonable, if one took into account their total volume. Mr Sax and Mr Lispington, pretending to be strangers, got into separate empty compartments at the other end of the coach.

By the time the train began to draw slowly away from the platform, they had left their compartments and were standing at two of the corridor windows. They seemed to be gazing into space, lost in melancholy thoughts, but a sharp-eyed radio technician would have noticed that they were talking to each other. Agaton Sax had taken the precaution of seeing that they were supplied with superb micro-



the German guard as the merry-go-round came to a stop.

'Simply because they really are conjurers and illusionists,' the landscape painter replied. 'It's their profession. They started off as illusionists and were very successful. Then Super Max realised that there were . . . other possibilities for three men with their extraordinary skill and intelligence. So now they are, as you have discovered to your cost, the bosses of Europe's most dangerous gang, operating on a wholesale basis. But,' he added with a pleased smile, 'they haven't reckoned with me, or not enough, anyway.'

From that last remark you will gather (if you haven't already) that the landscape painter was none other than Agaton Sax, and the German train guard his friend Lispington. The two had shadowed the Max brothers since they set off for the Tivoli, where they would be performing that afternoon at 15.00 hours. Three hours later, at 18.10, they would be leaving Copenhagen on the night express to Germany.

On application to the Board of Directors of the Danish and German State Railways, Lispington had been granted permission to wear the uniform of a German guard. Agaton Sax, of course, was privileged to assume any disguise he liked without having to ask anyone's permission.

Evening found the two friends standing on one of the platforms of Copenhagen's Central station. They were waiting for the Max brothers. Lispington had already made his mind up: he was going to arrest the three brothers, or at any rate one of them, as soon as the train had started. Agaton Sax had an altogether different plan, which he had decided was best kept to himself.

The three brothers appeared at the barrier and showed

'The three men you have been watching,' said the landscape painter, 'are a terror to the good lady who runs the china booth. As soon as she sees them her heart sinks, she summons the lorry that carts off the fragments and waits for the inevitable. Their aim is deadly. They smash everything to pieces, even the smallest egg-cup. They stay for about fifteen minutes, and by the time they've had enough she, poor thing, has collected a ten-pound deficit. The waiting lorry driver shovels up the bits, and drives off with all that is left of some twelve breakfast, dinner and tea services. You see the three bulky suitcases they are carrying? Those are needed to hold all the prizes they will shortly win at their next stop, the Darts Gallery.'

'But why on earth do they travel round Europe giving the sort of performance we saw the other night?' asked

'Now you can see what we are up against,' said the landscape painter. 'Our enemies always hit the bull's-eye, they always score the maximum number of points. Hullo! They've left the shooting galleries and are walking across to the China Smashing Booth—right over on the far left. Got it?'

The section of the Tivoli fun fair devoted to the destruction of pottery and porcelain is famous throughout the world. Here, in exchange for just one shilling, you are given six wooden balls, which are yours to aim at a random assortment of jugs, teapots, cups, saucers and plates, arranged on shelves just ten yards from the firing line. No prize is offered, no reward is needed other than the immense pleasure to be had from smashing (for so small a sum) such a splendid assortment of household crockery.

'Yes.'

'Well, swing slightly to the left and you'll see a new gallery that's just been put up.'

The guard pointed the binoculars in the direction his friend had indicated. His expression stiffened and he muttered angrily : 'Damn it ! You're right.'

'You see what I mean ?' said the painter. 'Now focus on the next gallery along.'

The German guard did so. Once more he mumbled furiously, this time under his breath.

5

Mysterious disappearances

Early the following afternoon two gentlemen walked into the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark. The Tivoli Gardens are the home of one of the most original and amusing fun fairs in Europe.

They were a strange looking couple. One of them was small and corpulent. His face was adorned with a stylish black moustache and he wore a green beret, a violet bow tie, and a jacket with the lurid check pattern favoured by artists a generation or so ago. In short he was obviously a painter, and he probably specialised in old-world landscapes.

The other man was tall, thin and formal in manner. He was evidently a Guard on the German Railways, for he was dressed in their green uniform, and a pair of ticket clippers was sticking out of one of his pockets.

The two gentlemen made their way towards the merry-go-round, where they joined the queue waiting for tickets. As they climbed into their seats, the German guard turned to the landscape painter, and said in a low voice :

'Are you quite sure?'

'Absolutely. Here, take the binoculars and have a look. You see the shooting-galleries over there?'

surprise . . . It's never happened before. Something must be wrong. But what?'

His wonderful brain worked at high pressure—or even higher. Then, suddenly, his face lit up, happy and relieved.

'I know!' he said. 'It's Aunt Matilda. As she dusted the computer yesterday, she accidentally pressed the button marked H 15, which stands for *History—15th Century*. So when I asked Clever Dick about the railway connections with Germany, he told me how I could best get there in the days of your English King Henry V. Do you understand?'

'No!' Lispington said firmly.

One hour later, the two friends were sitting in Lispington's small plane, ten thousand feet up and bound for Copenhagen. Agaton Sax himself was piloting the machine.

between the banknotes, then whoever has a hair that matches the one from the banknotes can be arrested and convicted without delay.'

'That's it,' said Agaton Sax. 'Now let's work out a timetable. Super Max and his brothers will be giving a performance in Copenhagen to-morrow evening. After that they will board a train for Cologne, where they will perform the day after to-morrow. Then they will leave at once for London. We'll get Clever Dick to give us a list of the train departures and connections that we shall need. He knows all the train and air timetables by heart.'

Agaton Sax pressed forty-odd buttons. Three seconds later another strip of paper appeared. He tore it off impatiently, then turned as white as the paper he was reading as he saw Clever Dick's message :

Go on horseback to the coast. Beware of highwaymen lurking in the woods. Arm yourselves with good broadswords, pikes, and longbows. You may be attacked by wolves when you get to Hylinge. Hire a two-masted caravel from Peter the Dutchman. He will charge you four silver Crowns. The passage over the Baltic will take about 50 hours if you have a fair wind. Otherwise it could take three days. If you want to go on to England, you must have a passport issued by King Henry V.

'Good heavens!' Lispington exclaimed. 'What an unreliable machine! Are you sure you have oiled it properly?'

Agaton Sax gazed at Clever Dick, then he looked up, saying in a toneless voice :

'I oiled him only yesterday with Aunt Matilda's sewing-machine oil . . . How extraordinary . . . What a disagreeable

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of languages—even such rare languages as Graelic and Brosnian. Strength of body: immense. Power of deduction: unmatched. Utterly superior in every way. Almost as intelligent as I. Clever Dick.

'Who on earth is this?' Lispington asked. 'He must be extremely dangerous. We'll have to hunt him down as soon as we can!'

'This man is . . . er—ahem—myself,' Agaton Sax said

modestly. 'Now, let us return to our friend, Super Max. As you know, he believes that he has outwitted us. He thinks he is in possession of the only piece of evidence against him and his gang that we had, namely the hair you sent me. But as you also know, he is mistaken.'

'Excellent,' said Lispington, rubbing his hands together. 'As soon as we have caught Super Max and his brothers all we have to do is compare their hairs with the hair we found

If I measure and analyse this hair, and transmit my findings to Clever Dick, he can immediately give me a detailed written description of the owner.'

Agaton Sax went to the wall and pulled aside the curtain. Lispington stared, his eyes wild, then he exclaimed :

'He's gone ! Clever Dick's not there.'

Agaton Sax nodded.

'Yes. He's gone. Surely you don't imagine, Mr. Lispington, that I would risk leaving Clever Dick unprotected, knowing that those two scoundrels would be prowling round here tonight ? No, that would have been foolish. Clever Dick has always been safely mounted on a lift. When I press the button on the wall, the lift takes him down to a vault in the basement. The vault is locked automatically, and it is virtually impossible for anyone, even Super Max, to get in there. If he did manage it, then I would have the satisfaction of knowing that he could never get out again. Now, I press the button, and up comes the lift with Clever Dick.'

Three seconds later Clever Dick was in his usual place in the wardrobe. Agaton Sax pressed a great number of blue, red and yellow buttons. The computer got to work in a flash. Its thoughts and calculations—each one so complicated that it couldn't possibly be explained—whirled round in a silent explosion of wheels, cogs, dials, streaks of light, sparkling indicators. A few seconds later, a strip of paper issued from the feeding slot of the machine. Eagerly, the two detectives read the text :

This hair belongs to a man. He is 5 feet 1 inch tall. Rather chubby. Weight : 167 pounds, 7 ounces. Age : 56, not 63. The man is a genius. He knows a great number

country, so she could do nothing about it. Then they rushed back to Super Max, who had just ended the show triumphantly, as you saw. At this moment they are driving in their big Rolls-Royce at lightning speed to a railway-station in Southern Sweden, where they will catch the train for Copenhagen at 1.52 tomorrow morning.'

'We must stop them—catch them!' Lispington exclaimed, red with excitement.

'No,' said Agaton Sax firmly. 'I have a better plan. We shall pursue them and arrest them—but only when the right moment comes. For the time being they must on no account be alarmed.'

'But when will the right moment come? Next year? Is that what you expect me to tell the British Government when I get back to London?' Lispington asked angrily.

'Oh no, I wouldn't dream of it,' said Agaton Sax reassuringly. 'Within a few days, I should say. But first let me return to the subject of your hair. You did the sensible thing when you sent me the hair, perhaps more sensible than you realised. I have devoted years to the study of hairs. Hair is, as you know, one of the best means of identification that exists. That's the reason why so many successful top criminals have been quite bald. With the assistance of my computer, Clever Dick, I can find out a lot of things when I have an interesting hair to examine. Take this one, for example.' He held up an almost invisible strand. 'This is what I would call a typical five thousand, three hundred and fifty-fifth.'

'It sounds a lot for such a little thing,' Lispington remarked drily. 'What does it mean?'

'It means that the person to whom this belongs has only five thousand three hundred and fifty-five hairs on his head.

here, had he not been absolutely sure that I was somewhere else.'

Agaton Sax sucked at his pipe. Lispington, who preferred a cigar, nervously put it down on the ash-tray, then picked it up again.

'This will be the end of Super Max,' Agaton Sax mused. 'The stakes were too high when he gambled on outwitting me. Nevertheless, he found himself here in Bykoping, pretending only to dazzle us with his conjuring tricks. He did dazzle us, but he didn't blind us. We knew his real reason for coming to Bykoping was to steal the hair. He arrived this morning with Mox and Mix, and immediately made for this house. Why? Because they needed to reconnoitre—to find out how they could get in, where my office was, if there were any guard-dogs about, and, if so, how many, how big, and how dangerous they might be. I fooled him, as you know. Disguised as my own grandfather, I showed him a letter saying that the hair was on my desk. He walked right into my trap.'

Lispington sprang up from his chair again.

'You don't mean to say that you risked my hair?'

'No. Not your hair. Another hair—yours I have here in my wallet. I got hold of one that resembled yours and put it in an envelope which I placed on my desk. Now it has gone.'

'But how . . . ?'

'It's all very simple, as a matter of fact. When Mox and Mix both disappeared from the barrels—which happened at precisely 21.04—they ran like mad from the cinema, broke open the back door of the house, stole into this very room, and snatched up the envelope containing the hair. My dachshund, Tickie, is away, staying with friends in the

to say that this man, Super Max, and his two fat brothers . . . ?'

'. . . are prominent members of the gang? Yes—of course!'

'But then we must arrest them immediately!'

'Not immediately, no. But as soon as we can. Let me proceed. The day before yesterday, I received a letter from Super Max. He wanted to have an advertisement inserted in my newspaper, the very one that we read earlier to-night. Greatly helped by my own intuition and deductive powers, and assisted to some extent by Clever Dick, I concluded that Super Max himself was the leader of the dangerous and powerful gang which is currently dominating the activities of the criminal underworld. As I told you before, I have been studying his technique for some years. He travels round Europe with his show, and is fêted everywhere as the greatest conjurer of the century. I, Agaton Sax, am the only person who knows that he is also the greatest gang-leader of the century. Until Super Max is exposed for what he is, he will remain a nightmare to the Police of Western Europe. He knows that nothing, or at least very little, escapes me here at my look-out post in Bykoping, but he believed that I had gone abroad. He also knew that you, Mr Lispington, had sent me the hair. He was convinced that it was his hair, dropped by accident when he and his accomplices robbed your government's armoured car. He simply had to lay hands on this dangerous piece of evidence, even if it meant stealing his own hair from my office. What did he do? Well, what would you have done in his place, Mr Lispington? Of course! You would have come here at once and taken the hair. But remember—he would not have dared to come

of his nose, gazed with a penetrating stare at Lispington and said slowly :

'Let me explain what has happened. As soon as I received your hair, I knew that the gang would be sure I had it. They have spies everywhere—*everywhere*—even in Bykoping, which it seems to me is rapidly becoming one of the most dangerous spots in the whole world for criminal activities. Presumably because *I* happen to live here. I also knew that the leader of the gang would issue orders to their confederates in Sweden to keep me under the very strictest surveillance. So I decided to set a trap for them. I put a notice in my newspaper—how very useful it is to be able to make an announcement without having to pay for it. I announced that, acting as a result of special information received from the most reliable sources, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Bykoping Post*, Agaton Sax, would shortly be going abroad for an unspecified period. Before the announcement appeared, I had a talk with one of my friends here, who is of the same height and . . . er . . . volume as myself. He disguised himself so skilfully that everybody, even Aunt Matilda, would have been taken in. So disguised, he took the train to Germany, where he was, of course, received with all the attention that I am accustomed to when I go abroad myself. He was shadowed by two members of the gang—travelling agents, you might say. This meant the gang leader was perfectly happy that I was abroad, while in fact I was here in this house all the time, disguised as my own grandfather!'

He paused. Lispington had been listening with increasing astonishment. The truth was beginning to dawn on him. His voice hoarse with admiration, he asked: 'You don't mean

'The time!' he called out. 'It was between 21.00 hours and 21.30 that they . . .'

'Exactly,' said Agaton Sax calmly. 'It is now 22.11 exactly. About an hour ago, the gang struck again.'

'How can you be so calm . . . How can we . . . Why aren't we . . . Where are we . . . Where are they?'

'Don't worry. Everything will be all right.'

'But where has the gang struck? Paris? Rome? London again?'

'Here.'

'Here?'

'Here.'

'Here in Bykoping?'

'Here in this very room.'

Lispington fell back on his chair. Agaton Sax poured him a glass of iced soda water.

'Please tell me,' Lispington murmured faintly.

Slowly and carefully Agaton Sax lit his pipe.

'You will appreciate, Mr Lispington, that it is not my wish to hide anything from the Police. To do so would be entirely against my nature. So first thing in the morning I shall take myself off to Mr Antonsson at the Headquarters of the Bykoping Police, and report to him the theft which the gang perpetrated here in this room.'

'And what have they stolen?'

'A hair.'

'A hair? Oh no!' Again Lispington sprang to his feet. 'Not my hair? Not the hair I sent you in a twice registered letter a few days ago?'

'No.'

Lispington wiped his forehead and sank back in his chair. Agaton Sax placed his forefingers thoughtfully on the tip

Agaton Sax refilled his pipe. A light blush spread across his round face, and he smiled a modest little smile.

'Thank you, Mr Lispington. But the explanation I have given so far is only half enough. It does not cover the *disappearance* of the two fat brothers.'

'I know! I know . . .' Lispington spluttered. He puffed so agitatedly at his cigar that he was almost choked. 'I know . . .' he hissed again, his voice lost somewhere in the dense cloud of smoke.

There was a moment's silence, then, having recovered his composure (and his voice), he continued:

'It's really very simple: there were two holes in the bottoms of the barrels and corresponding holes in the floor underneath the barrels.'

Agaton Sax shook his head.

'No. That's not possible. You see, if you wanted to make two holes like that in the floor of the stage, you would have to apply to the Office of Public Works for a permit. They would be most unlikely to give their permission. In any case, it would take them at least two weeks just to say no, and I, as Editor-in-Chief of the *Bykoping Post,* would automatically have been informed of Super Max's application.'

'I understand. But then that means I understand nothing.'

Lispington was deep in thought.

'And yet you came very near the truth, Mr Lispington, when you referred to the possibility of doors at the backs of the barrels. I *know* how Super Max did it. But it's not important, we will revert to the subject some other time. What we must do now . . .'

He stopped in the middle of his sentence, for Lispington had leaped in the air like a rocket, pointing feverishly at his watch.

wouldn't give much for my chances of keeping our Government quiet. They'd be after me all the time. What a lucky thing they are just conjurers and not under-cover operators. Have you any idea how on earth those two fat brothers could disappear like that? I'm absolutely baffled. Even if there were doors of some sort let into the backs of the barrels, the carpenter (Patterson wasn't it?) who checked the barrels should have noticed them. Any doors big enough to let those two out would have had to be almost as wide as the barrels themselves, wouldn't they?'

Agaton Sax nodded, sucked at his pipe, then knocked the ashes out into an ash-tray inscribed *From the International Customs Union, With deep gratitude for your Invaluable Assistance*.

'There are two possibilities,' he said slowly. 'One of them explains how it was possible for the two brothers to change places without our noticing it.'

'How?'

'Well, by not changing places.'

'But we actually saw Mox heaving himself out of Mix's barrel, and *vice versa*,' Lispington protested.

'True. But they might have done a quick change as soon as they were in the barrels.'

'A quick change? How do you mean?'

'Well, remember that the two brothers are very much alike except that Mox has a moustache. Suppose Mox's moustache was really a false one. If he took it off, he would look like Mix. On the other hand, if Mix put on a false moustache like Mox's, everyone would think he was Mox.'

'Extraordinary!' Lispington exclaimed, deeply impressed. 'Your talent for deduction, Mr Max—I'm sorry, I mean Mr Sax—is of the very highest order!'

Clever Dick's message

The Grand Finale of the Max Brothers' great show came at exactly 21.20 hours, when thirty white pigeons flew up from the two empty barrels and fluttered over the auditorium.

Grandfather Sax, leaning heavily on his stout oak walking stick, shuffled away from the cinema. Ten minutes later he was at the window of his office, watching for Lispington's return. His step was brisk now, but his expression was as worried as before.

'Phew!' said the Inspector, coming into the room and taking off his coat. He sank wearily into an arm-chair.

'Well, Mr Lispington,' said Agaton Sax, 'what did you think of it? It's a remarkable show, don't you agree?'

'Quite extraordinary.'

'Did anything special strike you during the performance?'

'No.'

'I see. Well it occurred to *me* that if those three gentlemen were to go in for crime Interpol would have its work cut out!'

Lispington stared at him, open-mouthed. Then he made a little gesture, as if to dismiss a disagreeable thought.

'You almost frightened me,' he said. 'If they did, I

pompously. 'Now, Mix, will you please go down into the barrel and look for your brother, Mox.'

Obediently Mix squeezed in once again, the sweat pouring from his forehead.

'Well? Can you find him?'

No answer. In the hush Super Max mopped his brow with a blue-spotted handkerchief.

'What's this?' he murmured, evidently very much worried by the turn of events. 'Will you have another look, Mr Patterson?'

'It's still empty. Mix has gone!' shouted Mr Patterson in alarm.

Super Max tore his hair in despair.

'This is terrible!' he exclaimed. 'The scoundrels! They have fooled me! Both have vanished into thin air! No doubt they have beaten it, scarpered, scrammed, and no doubt they took all my money with them! How can one be so utterly shameless with one's own brother! Rogues! Traitors!'

An enormous cheer greeted Super Max as he paced furiously up and down the stage in mock despair. But Agaton Sax was deep in thought. He had missed nothing that had happened on the stage. A smile flickered across his face as he stole a glance at his wrist watch. It was 21.05.

lid off barrel number one—like this. And the lid off barrel number two—like this. And what do we see? Of course, we see my dear brothers, Mox and Mix, as we expected. But *where* are they? That is the question! Is Mox in his barrel, number one, and Mix in his barrel, number two, as they just put themselves? Oh no! Mox squeezed himself into barrel number one, but now he must squeeze himself out of barrel number two! And Mix—where is he? Well, since there was no room for him any longer in barrel number two, he moved over to barrel number one!'

Unaccountably, in only two seconds, Mix and Mox had succeeded in changing barrels. Lispington frowned, and shot a glance at Agaton Sax.

'It's impossible,' he murmured to himself, but nobody heard him amidst all the cheering and clapping.

'Ladies and gentlemen, please! Do not think that I have finished yet. We must enact the stupendous end of this unique performance. Now watch very carefully, I beg you. Here it comes. My dear brother, Mox, will you get down into barrel number one please, and my dear brother, Mix, enter barrel number two, please.'

Red in the face with exertion, Mix and Mox squeezed themselves into the barrels again, and the lids were pressed down firmly. Once more the lights went out, and the audience counted—one—two. Once more Super Max lifted the lid of barrel number one. Out of it came Mix. He opened barrel number two. There was a clash of cymbals. The audience waited confidently expecting to see Mox—but instead Super Max turned to Mr Patterson and asked him to look into the barrel.

'It's empty,' he declared, disappointed and puzzled.

'Yes, you are right, it's empty!' Super Max proclaimed

'I now ask Mr Patterson, who is master-carpenter, he say, to be so kind as to check that there is no hole in the floors under the barrels, nor any doors at the backs of them. That is very good of you, Mr Patterson. Yes, you are finding out nothing that should not be thus, no?'

During this speech Mr Patterson was examining the barrels and the floor very carefully. He found nothing suspicious, and said so.

Mix and Mox bowed low to the audience—not an easy thing to do when you are as round as Humpty Dumpty. Super Max brandished his shiny top-hat and ordered:

'Ladies and gentlemen! Your attention, please! We have now come to our last and final and most astonishing trick. You are all prepared for it, eh? Very good!'

Nearly all the lights went out, leaving the stage faintly lit by two red lamps that shed their eerie glow over the barrels and the two fat men.

'You are about to see strange things happen. Strange, enigmatic and inexplicable things which you never dreamt of—never in your lives. I call this trick THE BAFFLING BARREL MEN. You will all know the very famous stage play, stupendous and magnificent, about two persons sitting in two barrels chatting quite nicely with each other. Well, this is not that play, oh no. It's nothing to do with it. Quite different, really. You can all see that this barrel to the left of me is numbered barrel number one, and that barrel to the right of me is numbered barrel number two. I now ask my dear brother, Mox, to climb up on to this little stool and then to get down into barrel number one.'

Mox made a deep bow, climbed the stool and then, obviously experiencing great difficulty at the narrow part, squeezed himself into the barrel.

'Very good indeed! That was a very nice squeeze, eh? And now I put the lid on it. There. Will my dear brother Mix insert his body in barrel number two, please.'

Mix repeated Mox's manœuvre and disappeared into barrel number two, which Super Max also closed with a lid.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' began Super Max in a hoarse stage whisper that added to the tension. 'The lights will now go out for two seconds—will you please all count—that's the way—*one, two*! Presto! We have lights! Now we can all see again. And what is it we see? Let us see! I take the

you with the green glasses! No, please, I beg you, do not take off your glasses! I like very much their green colour, sir! No, please, I beg you, do not shake your head, sir! You will be excellent—swell, man, as they say in some countries.'

He pointed at Lispington, who tried, without success, to make himself invisible. Super Max was already bearing down on him.

'You will come forward, no?'

As Super Max spoke in broken Swedish, Lispington did not understand a word of what he said, but nevertheless he was fully aware of the danger he was in. He shook his head energetically. Super Max treated him to a brief but penetrating stare, then he said:

'You do not understand my Swedish language, eh? Perhaps you are a foreigner, eh? Then I understand, sir, why you do not understand me. It is quite natural, so to speak. Thank you, sir.'

Agaton Sax watched the drama tensely, fearing that Lispington might lose his nerve and ruin everything. But Lispington did not move a muscle, just stared back at Super Max, who bowed and withdrew. Did Agaton Sax imagine it, or was there a dangerous glint in his eyes?

Super Max now turned his attention to Mr Patterson, the best carpenter in Bykoping, who was sitting next to Lispington. He did not hesitate to follow Super Max on to the stage. Mix and Mox disappeared into the wings for a moment, then came back rolling before them two enormous barrels, each one six feet high and two feet eight inches in diameter.

Super Max tapped lightly on Mr Patterson's shoulder with his magic wand, saying:

as a bad lot. As if that were not enough Mix then produced a tattered album filled with faded family snap shots. Prominent in one group was the missing Councillor Olsen, gaily dressed in Tyrolean costume.

This was followed by an even more baffling trick. Super Max stood alone in the centre of the stage. Dramatically he raised his magic wand above his head.

'Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention, please! Don't be frightened, I beg you, but prepare yourselves for the surprise of your lives. Look at me, ladies and gentlemen! Look carefully. I am here, am I not? Yes, surely. You can believe your eyes. Now. Turn round, ladies and gentlemen—turn round and look behind you. What do you see?'

Everyone turned round. The lights went out and for three seconds the cinema was pitch dark. It was only three seconds, though. Agaton Sax counted. When the lights went up again the stage was empty. But there, standing triumphantly at the back of the stalls, was Super Max, his magic wand in his hand and a victorious smile on his lips!

'Bravo! Extraordinary! Fantastic!' The audience shouted with admiration, and the applause was deafening.

'Dangerous stuff, this,' Agaton Sax murmured behind his long white beard. 'I don't like it.'

Nothing escaped his watchful eye. He stole a glance at his bullet-proof wrist watch. The fatal hour was approaching. Then, suddenly, something happened which even with all his foresight he had not anticipated.

Super Max walked briskly back to the stage. He stood for a moment surveying his spell-bound audience, then said:

'Will somebody come up on the stage with me, yes? Some nice young gentleman, perhaps? You there? Yes—you, sir,

'Excellent, Mr Sax.'

'Capital, Mr Lispington.'

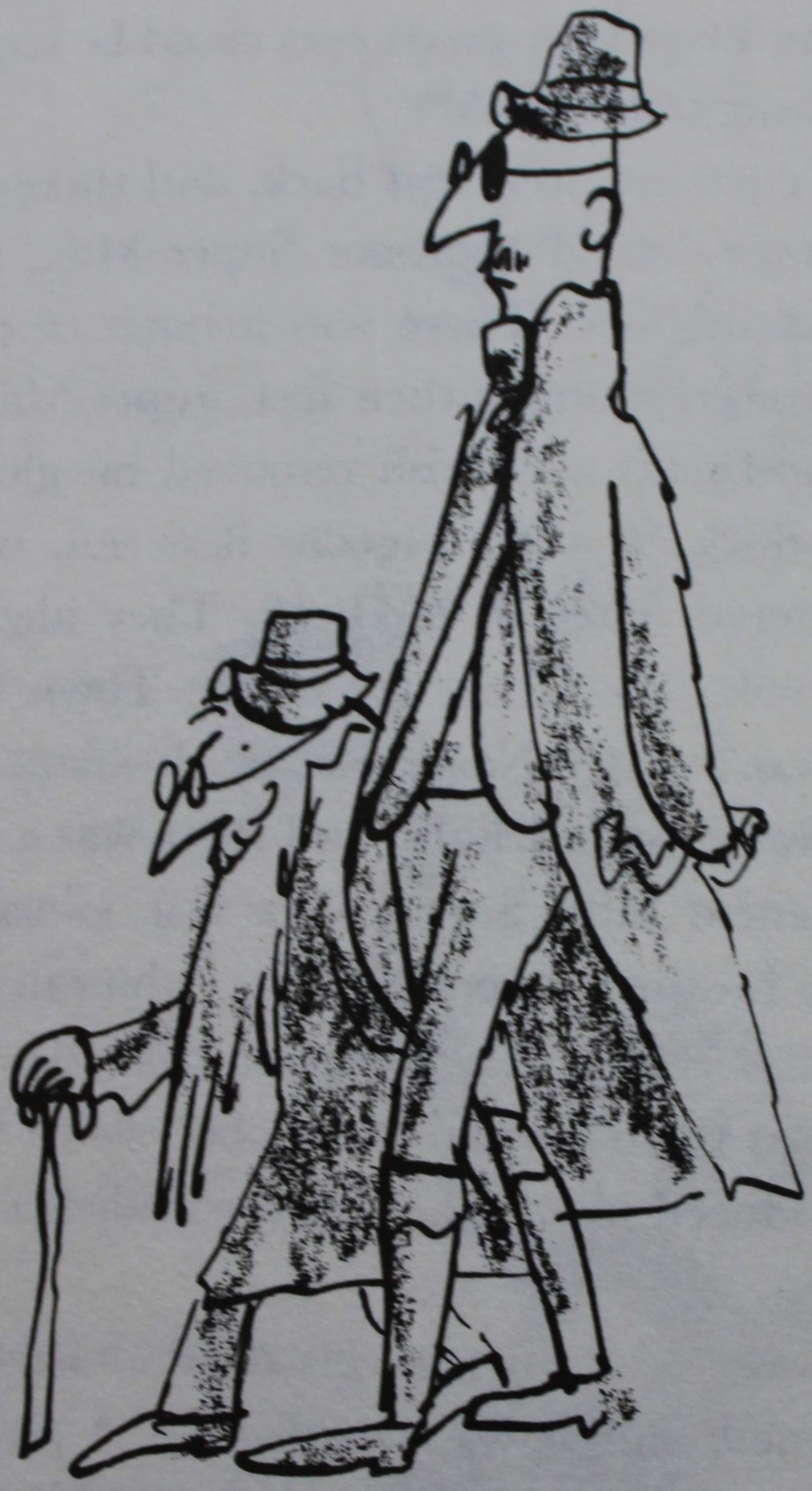
The Magic Lantern was packed with a crowd determined to enjoy their evening. On the dot of 20.00 hours an invisible orchestra (on a gramophone) blared forth with the stirring march *The Matchless Maxes*. The crimson curtain parted slightly, and two grey-green eyes could be seen peeping cautiously through the chink.

Suddenly the curtain was swept back, and there—in the middle of the stage—stood Professor Super Max, a broad smile on his cheerful face. There was a burst of clapping and some people even stamped their feet. Super Max raised his right hand and with a flourish removed his glossy top-hat. At once a flock of white pigeons flew out, each one carrying a registered letter in his beak. They alighted on the Mayor, his wife, the Chairman of the Town Council, and the Chairman's wife. Naturally this brilliant start to the show was greeted with delight, and there was a storm of applause. A moment later Super Max was joined by his two fat and jolly brothers, Mix and Mox, who ran onto the stage bowing and laughing. They were so alike that the only difference between them was a moustache—worn by Mox. Super Max introduced his brothers to the audience and the show began.

Agaton Sax watched it all with great admiration. Many of the tricks seemed completely inexplicable. A pound note which Super Max placed in his top-hat turned up in the Mayor's pocket-book. Mix took a snap shot of Councillors Jacobson, Olsen, and Lundgren. Five minutes later he produced an enlargement of the photo and showed it to his astonished victims. Mr Olsen was no longer there. His place had been taken by a certain Antonius Hansen, well known

Lispington) appeared to be about fifty years younger. Both wore Swedish clothes; the younger man's eyes were hidden behind a pair of dark green spectacles.

'Your seat is in the third row, Mr Lispington,' said Agaton Sax. 'Mine is just in front, in the second row. Here is your ticket.'



'Thank you.'

'Above all remember we don't know each other. On no account must we exchange a single word. Don't forget!'

'I shan't, I'll be as quiet as a mouse.'

'We'll meet again in my office after the show.'

BUT NOT LEAST : you must not miss

THE BAFFLING BARREL MEN

What's it all about? Come and see for yourself. THE MAGIC LANTERN at 20.00 hours. At 6/- a seat for such a show entrance is as good as free—You will never NEVER NEVER *NEVER* see anything better.

MOX MAX MIX MAX

SUPER MAX

'This man, Super Max, is a brilliant performer,' said Agaton Sax. 'I saw him a couple of months ago in Munich. The advertisement is telling the truth when it says you will never see anything better.'

But Lispington shook his head.

'I've no time for frivolities,' he murmured feebly.

Agaton Sax took no notice.

'For reasons I'll explain later, we must go in disguise,' he said.

'In disguise?' Lispington objected. 'I never go anywhere in disguise. Not since I was appointed Chief Inspector. I prefer to be recognised.'

'But nobody in Bykoping knows you—so a disguise will make no difference,' said Agaton Sax with indisputable logic.

Lispington yielded, not without a sigh.

Three hours later two persons were seen emerging from the back door of the offices of the *Bykoping Post*. One of them (we'll call him Agaton Sax, because it was Agaton Sax) was dressed up as his own (or Aunt Matilda's) grandfather. The other (we'll call him Lispington, because it was

anything at all—no one except you and me, Mr Lispington!'

'But how . . . ?'

'Calm yourself,' said Agaton Sax, offering his guest a cigar. 'I can't give you any details now, but everything will be explained in due course. What we both need is a diversion, so I suggest we go along to the MAGIC LANTERN this evening.'

'What's the MAGIC LANTERN, may I ask?'

'It's a local cinema. But they aren't showing a film tonight, because the Max Brothers are making a personal appearance on the stage.'

'And who are the Max Brothers?'

In answer Agaton Sax handed Lispington a copy of the *Bykoping Post* and pointed to an advertisement in huge type that filled over half the front page.

THE THREE FAMOUS MAX BROTHERS

Invite you to witness their DAZZLING, BREATH-TAKING, BAFFLING DISPLAY OF MANUAL MANIPULATION

This gigantic, stupendous show is a must for everybody. Featuring the world-famous PRESTIDIGITATOR, Professor SUPER MAX and his two brothers MOX MAX and MIX MAX. Come—Watch—Marvel! See a pigeon fly out of your Hat—a Handkerchief disappear from your pocket—You did have one, didn't you? You could find silver in your wallet, gold in your shoes. Anything could Happen! LAST,

3

A tight squeeze

Lispington was pacing up and down the room, deeply upset. A procession of confused thoughts chased each other round and round his brain. Agaton Sax watched him in silence.

Suddenly Lispington stopped dead.

'This is . . . this is dreadful!' he exclaimed. 'What am I to do? At any minute I shall get another telegram from the British Government, or urgent telephone calls from half-a-dozen Secretaries of State. Remember what Clever Dick said: "Between 21.00 and 21.30 to-night!" You must realise what that means, Mr Sax! What will happen to me when the Government finds out that I was not even in England when the gang struck for the second time?'

'My dear Lispington, you have nothing to fear!'

'What do you mean, nothing to fear?'

'The British Government won't even know that the gang has struck again.'

'But what about Scotland Yard? We'll have to report this message to the Police in England.'

'No we won't,' said Agaton Sax with great emphasis. 'The English Police must not be told. No one must know

'I would like to know when the gang will strike again,' he said eagerly.

'That's a good question!' said Agaton Sax with an approving smile.

He pressed a number of buttons on the instrument panel, and jotted down a few figures on a scrap of paper. Then asked Lispington for one or two facts, and added them to the information which he inserted in the computer. Finally he pulled a small lever.

There was a deep rumbling, then a series of clicks, a clanking and the clatter of cogwheels rattling in complicated machinery. The machine's 'thinking speed', as Agaton Sax called it, was terrific. It could solve a mystery as fast as Agaton Sax himself, sometimes even faster. This time, it took Clever Dick only 4·5 seconds to come up with an answer.

Suddenly Lispington was aware of a faint ticking, and Clever Dick's magic eye glowed a brilliant red. The silence that followed was almost frightening. Slowly a slip of paper emerged from a small slit under the magic eye.

'Here we are,' said Agaton Sax, tearing off the paper. 'Clever Dick's answer.'

He held the paper up to the light. In silence the two sleuths read the message:

THE GANG WILL STRIKE AGAIN TO-NIGHT BETWEEN 21.00 AND 21.30.

Lispington mopped his brow. In a daze he asked himself whether he, or Agaton Sax, or both of them, was dreaming.

'Is it possible?' he said.

'Yes,' said Agaton Sax.

gated. That leaves three hundred and twenty-five cases still unsolved. But before the first week of April there was a backlog of, say, six hundred and seventy-five crimes you and your men had not yet cleared up. That makes one thousand unsolved cases. Now, if you feed Clever Dick with all those facts and figures, then pull a few levers and press a certain number of buttons, he will immediately tell you *how many criminals* committed those thousand crimes. Do you understand?'

'No!'

'Very well. Then let me try a much simpler explanation. The problem is to extract, in accordance with the principles of statistical calculation, the relevant factors concerning a number of unsolved criminal cases; and, by making comparisons with certain previously registered factors, to establish a supposition of relevant conditions of identity, thereby creating the possibility of identifying an analogous number of compared criminal cases and criminals. Are you with me?'

'Yes, of course!'

'Very well. Now you understand how useful this computer is. Is there anything you would like to know?'

Lispington thought hard for a minute or two.

'No,' he answered.

'I see.'

Agaton Sax, too, thought hard a minute or two. Then he said cautiously:

'Are you quite sure there is nothing you . . .'

Suddenly Lispington saw the possibilities of this wonderful box.

'Yes, of course! I know!'

'Good! Come on!'

'May I introduce Clever Dick,' he said proudly.

Lispington stared, his eyes bulging. It is impossible to tell whom he had expected to see behind the curtain—but he certainly had not expected to see what he did see.

It was a brand-new machine: a large, shining metal cabinet filled the whole alcove. The front of the machine consisted of one gigantic instrument panel bursting with tiny cog wheels, small yellow dials with miniscule hands, regulator clocks, indicator bulbs, dynamos, buttons, switches and so on. And on top of it all there was a shining brass name plate inscribed with the two words CLEVER DICK.

Awe-struck, Lispington contemplated this masterpiece of the Age of Technology. There was silence for a minute or two. Finally Lispington said:

'Clever Dick, I presume?'

'Exactly.'

'And you, Mr Sax, by yourself you have . . . ?'

'Of course! This is my own invention. But Clever Dick, the ex-gang leader, gave me one or two useful hints.'

'And how . . . ?'

'How does it work? Well, it's quite natural that you should want to know,' said Agaton Sax, smiling proudly. 'This is a computer, built for my personal use. You know of course what a computer is?'

'Well . . . yes. Of course, I have heard one or two things about them, but . . .'

'Very well. I'll explain. Suppose, Mr Lispington, that you have a few facts. You know, for example, that one thousand five hundred and twenty-five crimes were reported in London during the first week of April this year. Of these crimes, one thousand two hundred were successfully investi-

'In a way, yes.'

'And the other one—who is he, and where is he?'

'There! Behind the curtain!'

Lispington gasped with surprise—and, perhaps, a shade of fear. He stared at the flowered curtain, which had been made by Aunt Matilda herself.

'I'm afraid I don't understand,' he said.

Agaton Sax stood up, and beckoned to his guest to follow him. With one quick tug he drew the curtain to one side.

telegrams. I can't tell you how happy your news has made me. But please, explain to me exactly how you went about it?'

'It was all very simple. Just a matter of establishing facts then drawing conclusions from them. For a long time now I have been following the exploits of an unidentified gang leader of exceptional skill and intelligence. Every week I have received reports from Scotland Yard and other European Police Headquarters on his activities, and by studying these carefully I have been able to form a clear picture of him. I now know what sort of a criminal he is, almost what he looks like. But of course I could not be absolutely sure of my facts till I had consulted Clever Dick.'

Lispington sprang up as if he had been stung by a wasp.

'Clever Dick!' he exclaimed. 'Surely you don't mean you know that unscrupulous rogue?'

'Of course! He is one of my most valuable assistants!'

'Clever Dick? The gang leader who escaped from Startmoor by climbing through the chimneys?'

Agaton Sax raised his hand reassuringly.

'Clever Dick is no threat to law and order any longer. He has reformed. He is, in his own way, a man of genius. He came to the conclusion that it was fruitless to go on trying to outwit me, Agaton Sax, so he turned from the paths of crime and now lives a blameless life, co-operating with several police forces and with me. I can give you his secret address if you would like to get in touch with him yourself. But as a matter of fact, I was not thinking of him when I said that Clever Dick had helped me to solve this case.'

'Am I to understand, Mr Sax,' said Lispington bitterly, 'that there are *two* Clever Dicks?'

Mr Lispington?' asked Agaton Sax, a trace of irritation discernible in his usually calm manner.

Lispington blushed and hung his head.

'I didn't know that . . .'

'That what?'

'That you are the leading authority on hair. It was only when . . .'

'It's all right,' said Agaton Sax with a forgiving smile. 'You sent the hair to me in the end. I have it now. I have examined it. I know to whom it belongs, and I know who substituted the forged notes for the genuine ones. You needn't worry any more. Everything will be all right.'

Lispington leapt to his feet. There was a gleam of hope in his eyes as he gazed reverently at Agaton Sax, who, with a gracious gesture, waved him into his chair again.

'You don't mean to tell me, Mr Sax, that you already know from whose head this hair was lost?'

'Of course,' replied Agaton Sax soothingly, 'it's obvious.'

'Then who is the man?'

Agaton Sax smiled again—a benevolent, condescending smile.

'I can understand your curiosity, Mr Lispington, it is only natural. But I am anxious to say nothing till I can give you proof, not only about the origin of the hair, but also about where the forged notes came from and who printed them. That I cannot do yet. I must ask you to wait a few days.'

Lispington nodded, then wiped his forehead.

'As you wish, Mr Sax. The British Government will probably lose patience and send me telegrams at least twice a day, but if I don't open them, they will eventually realise that I have more important things to do than read their

telegrams. I can't tell you how happy your news has made me. But please, explain to me exactly how you went about it?'

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Agaton Sax raised his hand reassuringly.

'Clever Dick is no threat to law and order any longer. He has reformed. He is, in his own way, a man of genius. He came to the conclusion that it was fruitless to go on trying to outwit me, Agaton Sax, so he turned from the paths of crime and now lives a blameless life, co-operating with several police forces and with me. I can give you his secret address if you would like to get in touch with him yourself. But as a matter of fact, I was not thinking of him when I said that Clever Dick had helped me to solve this case.'

'Am I to understand, Mr Sax,' said Lispington bitterly, 'that there are *two* Clever Dicks?'

Mr Lispington?' asked Agaton Sax, a trace of irritation discernible in his usually calm manner.

Lispington blushed and hung his head.

'I didn't know that . . .'

'That what?'

'That you are the leading authority on hair. It was only when . . .'

'It's all right,' said Agaton Sax with a forgiving smile. 'You sent the hair to me in the end. I have it now. I have examined it. I know to whom it belongs, and I know who substituted the forged notes for the genuine ones. You needn't worry any more. Everything will be all right.'

Lispington leapt to his feet. There was a gleam of hope in his eyes as he gazed reverently at Agaton Sax, who, with a gracious gesture, waved him into his chair again.

'You don't mean to tell me, Mr Sax, that you already know from whose head this hair was lost?'

'Of course,' replied Agaton Sax soothingly, 'it's obvious.'

'Then who is the man?'

Agaton Sax smiled again—a benevolent, condescending smile.

'I can understand your curiosity, Mr Lispington, it is only natural. But I am anxious to say nothing till I can give you proof, not only about the origin of the hair, but also about where the forged notes came from and who printed them. That I cannot do yet. I must ask you to wait a few days.'

Lispington nodded, then wiped his forehead.

'As you wish, Mr Sax. The British Government will probably lose patience and send me telegrams at least twice a day, but if I don't open them, they will eventually realise that I have more important things to do than read their

fore the fire could be put out. Or, to be more correct, those present *believed* that some seven hundred pounds had been burnt. But only for a moment. The President realised almost at once that the Bank of England, that is, the State, had suffered no loss at all, since a genuine thousand-pound banknote would not catch fire from burning tobacco. The President at once sent for experts from the big Insurance Company NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE LTD. They examined the notes and established beyond doubt that they were all forged. That, of course, was why the note caught fire.'

A deep silence filled the room. It was broken by Lisping-ton drumming on the arm of the chair. The furrows on his forehead seemed to deepen as he thought over all that had happened.

'A very sad story, indeed,' said Agaton Sax. 'Sad and serious. You found a clue, though, didn't you? Where did you discover the hair?'

'Between two notes numbered AXY 30498 and AXY 30499—No, wait a minute, it can't have been 30498 and 30499, I must be muddling them with the numbers of our forms for reporting Lost Property—it must have been AXY 37865 and AXY 37866. Anyhow, I examined the hair at once. As you already know, Mr Sax, we failed to establish the identity of its owner, or to discover from what head it had dropped. First we went through our own collections of hair in the Human Hair Department at Scotland Yard with a tooth comb. Nothing came of that, so we referred the matter to Professor Monkmorton in New York, who also drew a blank. Finally we sent the hair to Doctor Bubble in Manchester who compared it with some three hundred and ninety thousand others. All in vain.'

'Why didn't you send the hair to me in the first place,

'Good! You see, the fact is, that if you ever want to burn a thousand-pound note, you'll have to use a specially long match, or a cigarette lighter, a little wax match from a book of matches would be no good at all. Have a try, and you'll see. In no circumstances could you do the job with a fragment or two of burning tobacco. In no circumstances,' Lispington added emphatically.

'I'll remember that,' Agaton Sax promised.

'Good. Well, a most remarkable thing happened. The banknote immediately caught fire. What brand of tobacco the guard had in his pipe we do not yet know—probably Spanish or Scottish—our investigations are not yet complete. But to get back to that dreadful burning. Some seven hundred pounds (if you see what I mean) burned away be-

programme thought it would be too monotonous to show the President counting all the notes, so they cut it just after he began. Isn't that outrageous? Too monotonous! Wouldn't you, Mr Sax, find it interesting to watch a man counting a thousand thousand-pound notes? Have you ever seen such a thing?'

'No, I haven't,' said Agaton Sax. 'I never gave it a thought.'

'Anyhow, it was all filmed except the counting.'

'And no notes were missing?'

'No. The President is good at counting. A real expert, as a matter of fact. There was no mistake.'

'Good. And what happened next?'

'The notes were taken down to the vaults. As the President was putting them into the safe, he dropped one on the floor. Now, it happens that smoking is strictly forbidden in the vaults—instructions to that effect were issued on 17th July 1923, 2nd November 1938, 15th April 1947 and 14th March 1960. The full text of the regulations has been published and posted up several times and should be very well known by the whole staff. But in spite of that, one of the guards was smoking a pipe at the very moment that the President dropped the note. The guard bent down to pick it up, and as he did so, one or two fragments of burning tobacco fell on the banknote. Do you know what happened then, Mr Sax?'

'No.'

'Have you never tried to burn a thousand-pound note, Mr Sax?'

'No.'

'A five-hundred-pound note?'

'No—never!' protested Agaton Sax firmly.

'Just a minute!' said Agaton Sax. 'How do you know that the rear door was properly locked?'

'Because the policemen and the officials checked it. *The door at the back of the car was not opened by the thieves!* And yet . . .'

Lispington's voice trailed off, he seemed to be searching for words behind the curtain, just below the ceiling.

'And yet . . . ?' prompted Agaton Sax sympathetically.

'And yet it did happen. When the policemen had checked the rear door, they signalled to the driver to start the car. He did, and drove off at speed. He had orders to proceed as fast as possible even if he had to break the traffic regulations. Seven minutes later he stopped at the main entrance of the Bank of England. There were, as always, four policemen waiting for them. They opened the rear door immediately. The suitcases were carried out of the car and into the Bank.'

'Was this filmed by the TV people, too?'

'Yes, everything was filmed. You can see every detail—even the police sergeant's shoe-laces.'

'The police sergeant's shoe-laces?'

'Yes, you see this particular sergeant was wearing one brown and one black shoe-lace. He had been reprimanded for it on several occasions, but it seems he is incorrigible. On colour television the laces showed up quite clearly. Now, where was I? Oh yes—the suitcases. The camera followed the men carrying the suitcases—you see them enter the office of the President of the Bank—you see the President himself take the two suitcases—you see him open them—and you see him start to count the notes. But the full count was never shown in the television programme! Can you imagine, Mr Sax, the blockheads responsible for the

2nd this year. At 9.47 two officials of Her Majesty's Bank Note Printers carried two suitcases from the Printers to an armoured car waiting for them in the street. They had the usual police escort. The two suitcases contained one thousand thousand-pound notes.'

'So the banknotes came to the armoured car straight from the printing-press?'

'Definitely. They had been printed during the night, and had the characteristic smell of newly printed thousand-pound notes. As usual, four policemen were in the building during the whole of the printing process.'

'Good.'

'The thousand banknotes, worth one million pounds, were taken direct from the press to the armoured car.'

'Just a minute,' Agaton Sax interrupted, 'is that established beyond all doubt?'

'Absolutely! It was all filmed!'

'Filmed? Why?'

'Well, because a television company wanted to make a film showing the extraordinary precautions taken by the authorities and the police to protect newly printed thousand-pound notes.'

'I see. Then what happened?'

'The two suitcases containing the notes were carried into the armoured car. The rear door of the car was secured with the utmost care. The two officials and the policemen were there all the time.'

'Good. But after that there was nobody in the back of the car to watch the suitcases?'

'No. That wasn't necessary. You see, there were two policemen sitting beside the driver. As soon as the rear door had been closed and firmly locked . . .'

A crime and a clue

'Please sit down,' said Agaton Sax.

Inspector Lispington nodded, and sank into an armchair. He was thinner than he had been when Agaton Sax saw him last. There were marks of strain on his long face, and the furrows in his forehead had deepened. Perhaps this was the result of the many long and fruitless conversations he had been having with members of the British Government and other important people. These people always wanted to know why nothing had been done, or, if something had been done, as the Inspector maintained, why nobody knew anything about it; and when would they be told what had been done, and by whom?

Agaton Sax puffed at his pipe, and looked thoughtfully at his guest.

'Let's sum up what we know about the case,' he said.

Lispington sighed deeply, a flicker of a smile on his pale face.

'That's easily done,' he said.

'Good. What have we got so far?'

'A crime and a hair,' answered Lispington. 'The hair is now in your possession. The crime was committed on April

lying on a velvet cushion inside the case. With the utmost care he placed the object under the microscope in order to check, once more, that his earlier observations and conclusions were correct. They were indeed. There was not the slightest doubt about it. He nodded. This hair belonged to the very person he had all the time suspected it belonged to.

'I never make mistakes,' he murmured to himself. 'At least not as far as hairs are concerned.'

Again he stretched out his hand—this time to the bookcase. He took down one of the most famous books ever written on Police methods in the fight against crime. It was, as you will have guessed, *A Few Billion Hairs* by the famous American professor, Charles B. Bickeridge.

For the next few hours, Agaton Sax puffed dense clouds of smoke as he studied Professor Bickeridge's book. Once or twice he got up from his chair and groped his way through the huge cloud to a dark red curtain that hung across the front of a wardrobe. Cautiously he moved the curtain aside and peered into the wardrobe.

Later that afternoon, at 18.15 to be precise, things began to happen. As a matter of fact, this proved to be the critical point in the whole affair, for it was at this very moment that Inspector Lispington of Scotland Yard landed on Johansson's meadow.

'Free tickets? What for?' Aunt Matilda exclaimed suspiciously.

'For my great and sensational Show in Bykoping tonight!'

With a flourish Archimedes Max drew a bulging wallet from his breast pocket and handed two free tickets to grandfather, who accepted them with a courteous bow. Then the three gentlemen said good-bye, and, with their walking sticks twirling in perfect formation, went off in the direction of the City Hotel.

Lost in thought, Agaton Sax watched them disappear round the corner. Everything was absolutely clear to him! Everything fitted his calculations. He rubbed his hands, and a smile could be seen hovering in his long, majestic beard. Aunt Matilda had withdrawn. She was an energetic and forceful character, but nonetheless she knew perfectly well that there were moments when her nephew was not to be disturbed.

Suddenly, in one bound, Agaton Sax was at the foot of the stairs leading to his office. Five or six seconds later he was sitting at his desk. He jotted down a few notes on a scrap of paper, then lit his second Friday pipe. Dense clouds of smoke hung round him. It was as if he needed the heavy cloud of tobacco smoke to cut him off from the rest of the world and help his wonderful mind to see even more clearly. He stretched out his right hand for the magnificent BL 57 microscope which he had recently been given by the United Banks of Europe '*in token of our everlasting gratitude*'. (It was worth £30,000.)

On his desk there was a small lead case, no larger than an ordinary match-box. Carefully he opened the lid. With a pair of tweezers he picked up an almost invisible object

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'Very excellent, indeed, Mr Grandfather,' said the tall foreign gentleman, handing back the letter to grandfather. 'Would you please tell Mr Sax, when he returns, that Messrs Max, Max, and Max were here to see him, eh?'

'Is that all?'

'Yes. Or would you perhaps say something more, Mr Grandfather? Very well. Then tell him that I, Archimedes Max, the most famous Illusionist in the whole world, would like to see the most famous Private Detective in the whole world, Mr Agaton Sax. Is that O.K., eh?'

'I'll certainly tell him, Mr Archimedes Max. He will be deeply flattered,' said grandfather.

'Excellent! And may I now present you with two free tickets, one for you, charming lady, and one for you, most respectable Mr Grandfather.'

gentlemen, who followed him into the sitting room, though Aunt Matilda tried to stop them, muttering fiercely through clenched teeth, 'You'd better watch out, or I'll send for Inspector Antonsson! Nobody makes a fool of him.'

'How do you do, Mr Grandfather!' shouted the tallest of the men. 'We want to see Mr Agaton Sax on a very important matter of business, but to my most deepest regret this most kindly lady tells me that he is gone away far away, eh?'

'That's just what he has done,' said Agaton Sax in a perfect imitation of an old man's voice.

'And could you tell me, please, Mr Grandfather, when he is expected back, eh?'

'I'm awfully sorry,' said Agaton Sax, managing to look as if he meant it, 'but he won't be back till next Friday.'

'Next Friday, eh? Another week, then?'

'Yes. As a matter of fact I had a letter from him yesterday afternoon.'

Grandfather searched his pockets, one after the other, until at last he managed to find the letter he had just written to himself.

'Here it is,' he said triumphantly, offering it in a hand that trembled just a little, as an old man's might.

The tall gentleman took the letter, unable to conceal his eagerness, and read it:

Dear Grandfather and Aunt Matilda,

I will be returning late on Friday, 30th April. Thank you for letting me know that there is a letter from Inspector Lispington waiting for me. Don't bother to open it, just leave it on my desk. Please prepare a cup of chocolate made with whipped cream, but don't sit up for me. Regards, Agaton.'

as balls. They were all extremely well dressed, sporting grey Ascot toppers with gloves and spats to match.

The tallest of the three gentlemen smiled an ingratiating smile at Aunt Matilda and said, with a pronounced foreign accent:

'My dear Madame, may I see Mr Agaton Sax?'

Aunt Matilda glared at him.

'Gone away,' she said.

'Gone away, eh? Then he has gone away far away, eh?'

'As far away as he pleases,' Aunt Matilda retorted, giving nothing away.

But the tall gentleman was not to be put off easily. Still smiling, he went on:

'So perhaps, Madame, you can inform me about his return? When will he come home again, eh?'

'Only grandfather knows that.'

'I see, Madame. Would it then be possible for me to see this Mr Grandfather?'

Aunt Matilda turned away from the door, and looked across the hall. Through the open door of the sitting room could be heard the strident tones of a record player.

'Grandfather!' she shouted, 'turn that confounded machine off. I'm sick of hearing the same old record. Anyway, there are three gentlemen here to see you.'

The three gentlemen winked at each other and leered horribly. Then they twirled their walking-sticks again.

A very old man came through the sitting-room door. It was Agaton Sax, of course, disguised as his own sprightly grandfather—or perhaps Aunt Matilda's grandfather, in which case he would have been even older and more sprightly.

With a friendly smile on his face he beckoned the three

tions, Aunt Matilda waited for the third ring before going to open it. There they stood—three gentlemen, swinging their walking-sticks with such extraordinary dexterity that one got the impression they were doing a music hall turn they had rehearsed for many months. The three gentlemen

varied in height and volume. The tallest stood about four inches higher than his nearest companion, who in his turn was about two inches taller than the third man. The tallest of them was fairly thin, whereas the other two were as round

'Good-bye, Mr Sax.'

He hung up. Then, leaning back in his revolving chair, he called out to the wall :

'All right, Aunt, I heard you banging. I'll come down for coffee straight away.'

'No, Agaton,' the wall answered firmly, 'coffee isn't ready yet. But you said an hour ago that I should tell you at once if I saw a visitor coming through the peep-hole in the door —I mean when I saw through the peep-hole that someone was coming. And here they are now !'

'They ?'

'Yes ! They ! Scoundrels or detectives or something. The sort of people one expects to see coming here. They are carrying walking-sticks, and swinging them dangerously. It looks as if they intended to throw them at me.'

'Good, couldn't be better,' Agaton Sax exclaimed, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. 'Remember my instructions, Aunt Matilda ! Let them ring three times, then open the door. Tell them I have gone away and nobody but grandfather knows when I'm coming home. Fine ! Splendid !'

Quick as a flash Agaton Sax pulled on a very ancient, greenish smoking-jacket, then dived into an enormous old chest from which he emerged a moment later totally transformed. A flowing white beard adorned his cheeks and his chin, a pair of fine old spectacles perched on his nose, and in his right hand he held a fat book entitled *The Art of Growing Older*. He felt in his pocket to make sure he had the letter there—a letter that he had written the night before in readiness for this very occasion—one which he had, of course, foreseen.

There was a ring at the door. According to her instruc-

that is, to Bykoping. Seizing the phone he rang the Post Office.

'Hullo! Agaton Sax here. Who's speaking?'

'The Post Office, Mr Sax,' answered a friendly female voice. 'What can we do for you today?'

'I want to send a most important telegram, Miss Olsson. Perhaps the most important I have ever sent.'

'As you wish, Mr Sax. I'm all ears.'

'Good. The telegram is for Inspector Lispington of Scotland Yard. This is the message.

DEAR MR LISPINGTON STOP CLUE SAFELY UNDER LOCK AND KEY STOP IT IS AN EXTREMELY PRECIOUS CLUE STOP DON'T WORRY STOP IT'S ME THEY'RE AFTER NOT SCOTLAND YARD STOP I THINK I HAVE SOLVED THE RIDDLE STOP YOU HAD BETTER FLY OVER AT ONCE STOP LAND ON JOHANSSON'S MEADOW OUTSIDE BYKOPING AT 18.15 TODAY STOP AUNT MATILDA IS BANGING ON THE WALL SO I HAVE TO STOP STOP AGATON SAX

'Have you got that, Miss Olsson?'

'Yes, indeed, Mr Sax, but . . .'

'But what, Miss Olsson?'

'Did you say there was someone banging on the wall?'

'Yes! Can't you hear it?'

There was silence. Miss Olsson was obviously listening hard.

'Of course, Mr Sax. Now I can hear it. But I didn't know it was your aunt.'

'I see. Well, it is my aunt all right, and when she bangs, I have to pay attention. She wants me to stop talking. Goodbye, Miss Olsson.'

I

A not unexpected Visit

At seventeen minutes past nine on the morning of Friday, 23rd April, Agaton Sax, Editor-in-Chief of the *Bykoping Post*, was handed a telegram.

Most people, if they had received such a telegram, would have been terribly upset. Most people—but not Agaton Sax. He was never caught napping. As he read the telegram he didn't bat an eyelid, or lose a trace of his normal composure.

DEAR MR SAX STOP I HAVE TO RAISE THE ALARM AGAIN STOP THE UNKNOWN GANG HAS STRUCK ONCE MORE STOP NO ONE KNOWS WHERE STOP PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE CLUE I SENT YOU STOP IT IS THE ONLY ONE WE HAVE GOT STOP PLEASE HURRY IF YOU CAN STOP SOMEONE IS COMING THROUGH THE DOOR SO I HAVE TO STOP STOP LISPINGTON SCOTLAND YARD

Thoughtfully, Agaton Sax twiddled his elegant moustache. His penetrating blue eyes stared through the window. For a few seconds he was lost in contemplation of the telegram's strange message. Then, with a jolt, he came down to earth,

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AGATON SAX

AND THE

MAX BROTHERS

by Nils-Olof Franzén

Illustrated by Quentin Blake

ANDRE DEUTSCH

By the same author

Agaton Sax and the Diamond Thieves

Agaton Sax and the Scotland Yard Mystery

Agaton Sax and the Criminal Doubles

Agaton Sax and the Colossus of Rhodes

Agaton Sax and the London Computer Plot

Agaton Sax and the League of Silent Exploders

Agaton Sax and the Haunted House

Agaton Sax and the Max Brothers

Nils-Olof Franzén

A bank guard dropped a speck of burning ash on a thousand-pound banknote. A genuine banknote would not even have smouldered, but this one flared up and Agaton Sax was off on another tantalising, baffling case. He's up against a gang which includes The Max Brothers — acrobats, prestidigitators and specialists in disappearing tricks — and the only clue he has is a hair. Lispington, muddled as ever, is keen to help; Clever Dick is invaluable; Aunt Matilda heroic. Her solo flight across the channel with the gang's pilot locked in the galley is the beginning of the end for Super Max. He can 'disappear' from Byköping, he can 'disappear' from the Cologne Express, but not even he can elude Aunt Matilda when she's really on the warpath.

Once again Quentin Blake's drawings add to the fun.

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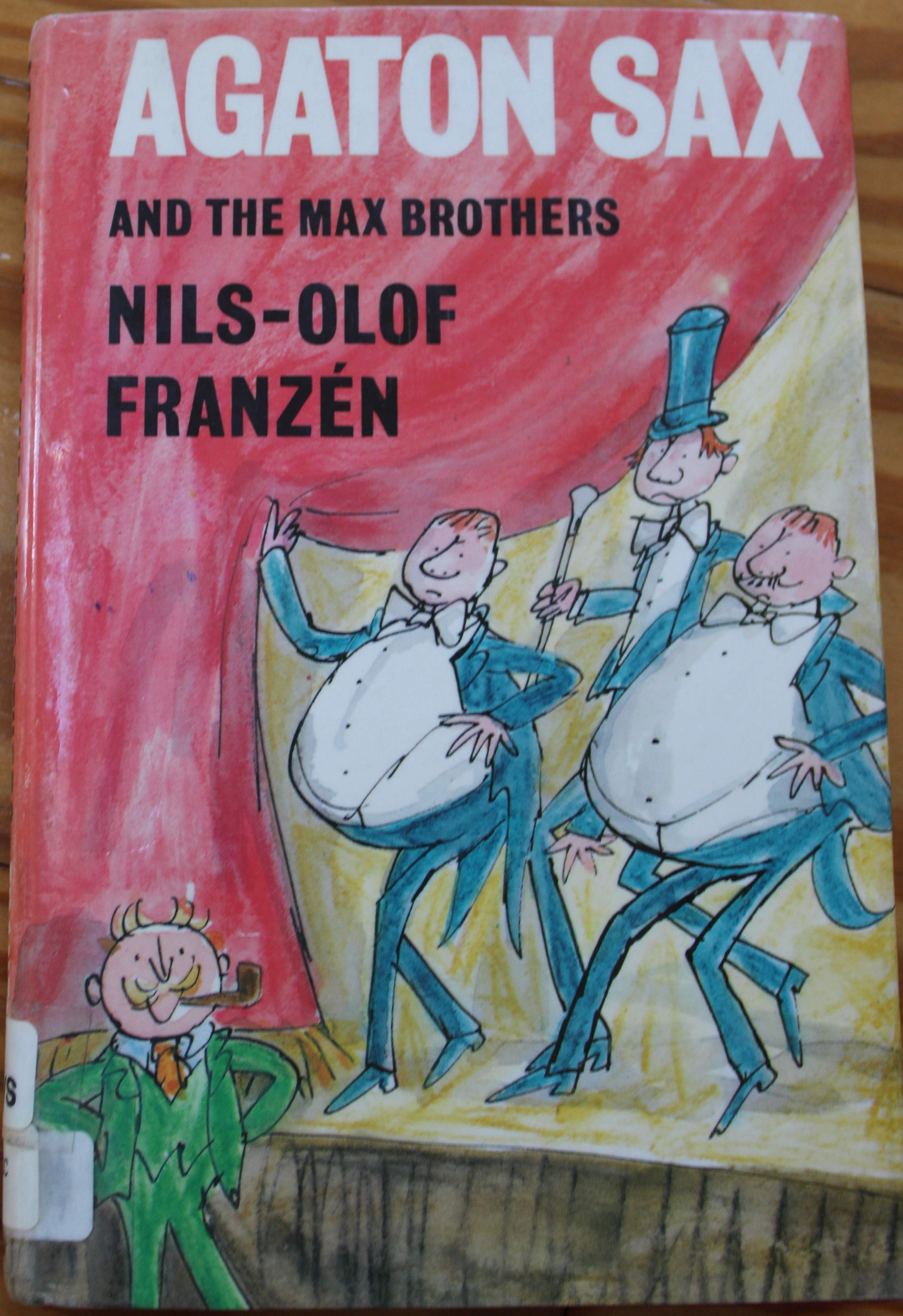
AGATON SAX

AND THE MAX BROTHERS

NILS-OLOF FRANZÉN



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